

MINISTRY UPDATE | THIRD QUARTER 2015

SECRETS UNSEALED



Reflections on

SAN ANTONIO



Dear *friend* of Secrets Unsealed,

In the last three years Secrets Unsealed has dedicated much time, effort and financial resources to address the issue of women's ordination. We felt that this was such an important matter that we needed to dedicate quality time to produce material on the side of the issue that was not being addressed by denominational publications.

But now it is time for Secrets Unsealed to move on. I firmly believe, to use the words of the wise man, Solomon, that when it comes to women's ordination "*there is nothing new under the sun.*" All the theological arguments have been presented and I can't think of a single argument that I have not heard before.

The world church in San Antonio voted 'no' for the third time since 1990. The matter is now in the hands of the Administrators and Committees at the higher levels of church organization. They will have to make difficult decisions on what to do about entities that refuse to abide by the vote of the world church. They need our prayers more than ever!

Unless there is some major development, the article in this newsletter will be my last on this particular topic. The article is long but very important, so please take the time to read it in its entirety.

There are other pressing issues that we must address: The exponential growth of papal power, the union of Protestants with the papacy and the union of political leaders with the papacy. We must now turn to these life and death issues and inform the church and the world about the dangers ahead.

We appreciate your prayers and financial support. There is much work to do and we are thankful that you are willing to partner with us.

Trying times are ahead but remember that God has promised, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" Hebrews 13:5 (NKJV).

Longing for His coming,



Pastor Stephen Bohr

President and Speaker, *Secrets Unsealed*



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Reflections on

SAN ANTONIO



BY PASTOR STEPHEN BOHR

The General Conference (GC) session in San Antonio is now over and conservative Seventh-day Adventists (SDA'S) have much to be thankful for. First of all, in spite of some opposition by a small but vocal group, our beloved GC President Ted Wilson was reelected for another five-year term. Further, the delegates overwhelmingly voted to strengthen the language in The Church Manual that marriage is the union between one man and one woman and that creation took place a few thousand years ago in six literal days just as we experience them today.

Women's Ordination Debate

But of course the item of greatest interest on the agenda was the discussion on women's ordination. On Wednesday, July 8, after a daylong discussion on the floor of the Sixtieth GC Session in San Antonio, the delegates, for the third time, voted that women could not be ordained to the gospel ministry. By a margin of 17% (1,381 to 977 with 5 abstentions) the world church voted that Division Executive Committees were not authorized to unilaterally approve the practice in their

territories.

On Friday, July 10, 2015, just two days after the 'no' vote on women's ordination, the newly elected GC president, Ted Wilson, and the North American Division (NAD) president, Dan Jackson, made statements that have confused some church members. At Secrets Unsealed, we have received a number of emails and phone calls asking us to explain what Elders Wilson and Jackson meant by their statements.

Here is Elder Ted Wilson's statement: "The vote on Wednesday did not have anything to do specifically with women being ordained as **local elders**. Now, people may have differing opinions on that particular subject, but the vote on Wednesday was not pertaining to that, neither was it pertaining to anything in policy regarding **commissioned ministers**. So let us be clear on what was voted on Wednesday. We are now back to our **original understanding**, and I would strongly urge all to adhere by what has been voted. But do not place into the vote other things that were not listed in the vote. We need to be fair, we need to be open, and we all need to accept what is voted at a General Conference session."

Andrew McChesney of the Adventist News Service (ANN), filed the following report on July 10 about Dan Jackson's response to Elder Wilson's remarks:

"Shortly after Wilson spoke, North American Division president Daniel R. Jackson issued a statement saying that the **division** 'would comply with the vote of the world church.'"

He said the **division** acknowledged that, 'the vote prohibited the 13 world **divisions** of the church from making their own decisions regarding the consideration and potential implementation of women's ordination to the gospel ministry.'

"But, he added, the motion did not disallow women from serving as **commissioned church pastors**; women from serving as **ordained elders** in the local church, and the ordination of deaconesses.

'Since the motion did not disallow these things, we therefore continue to encourage those who have been serving in these capacities to continue to do so,' Jackson said.

'It is vital to understand that the NAD will continue to follow the directions found in the General Conference Working Policy allowing conferences and unions to license women as commissioned ministers in pastoral ministry. We will also continue to encourage utilizing the services of women as ordained local elders and deaconesses.'

As I have said before, the statements by Elders Wilson and Jackson have confused many. Questions are asked such as: If all is the same as before, why did we spend millions of dollars to study the issue? Why did Elders Wilson and Jackson state that Unions and Conferences will still be allowed to commission women to perform many of the same duties as ordained pastors (including baptizing, officiating at Communion and performing marriages) and to ordain local women elders and deaconesses? What then was really accomplished at the GC session?

The frustration was manifest in a letter I received from a supporter of Secrets Unsealed: "Since no counter-motion was made, as I had suggested, to permanently eliminate the ordination of commissioning of women as local elders and pastors, we're left in the very same moral and organizational mess we were in before the vote was taken. No moral progress was made. Nothing has really changed."

So what was really accomplished at the GC session in San Antonio? The only way to answer this question and the others is to take a look at the trajectory of the women's ordination discussion in the recent history of the SDA church. Let's begin with the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy qualifications for the church office of elder/overseer.



Biblical Qualifications for an Elder/Overseer

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7:

“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a **bishop** [overseer], he desires a good work. ² A bishop [overseer] then **must** be blameless, the **husband of one wife**, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; ³ not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; ⁴ one who **rules his own house well**, having his children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule **his own house**, how will he take care of **the church of God?**); ⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

TITUS 1:5-9:

“For this reason I left you [Titus] in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and **appoint elders** in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the **husband of one wife**, having **faithful children** not accused of dissipation or insubordination. ⁷ For a **bishop** [overseer] **must** be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

In summary, there are three crystal clear points in these Bible passages:

1. The words ‘elder’ and ‘bishop’ (one who supervises or oversees) are used **interchangeably**—the first refers to an **office** and the second to a **function**.
2. The elder/overseer **must** be of the **male gender**, the husband of one wife.
3. Wise rulership of the male in his **home** qualifies **him** to be a wise ruler **in the church**.

Spirit of Prophecy Qualifications for an Elder

The Spirit of Prophecy fully concurs with this Biblical perspective. Notice the number of times that Ellen White employs the **male pronoun** to describe the elder/overseer: “If a **man** does not show wisdom in the management of the **church in his own house**, how can **he** show wisdom in the management of the **larger church** outside? How can **he** bear the responsibilities that mean so much, if **he** cannot govern **his** own children? **He** discrimination is not shown in this matter. God’s blessing will not rest upon **the minister** who neglects

the education and training of **his** children. **He** has a sacred trust, and **he** should in no case set before church members a defective example in the management of **his** home.” 5MR 449 (1901)

“That family, properly conducted, is a favorable argument to the truth, and the head of such a family will carry out the very same kind of work in the church as is revealed in the family. Wherever severity, harshness, and want of affection and love are exhibited in the sacred circle of the home, there will most assuredly be a

failure in the plans and management in the church.” *Evangelism*, p. 342

The movement in favor of women’s ordination in the SDA Church has involved several incremental steps, with each step building on the previous one. Each incremental step has placed the Church into a deeper and ever more complex quagmire. In this outline I will present only some of the high points of those incremental steps.

1968: First Request to Ordain Women Pastors

The issue of women’s ordination first surfaced in **recent times** in the SDA Church in 1968. In that year the Northern European Division sent a request to the GC, requesting permission for Finland to ordain some women as ministers. Although this request had **no Biblical support**, the matter was submitted for study to several committees. Instead of immediately upholding the biblical gender requirement, the leaders at the GC stalled for time. But stalling or delaying a decision does not usually solve a problem but rather compounds it, and it wasn’t long before the issue surfaced again.

1973-1974: Camp Mohaven and Annual Council

On July 19, 1973, the GC Executive Committee voted to establish an *ad hoc* committee on the role of women in the church. Just under two months later, on September 16-20, 1973, the 25 members of “The Role of Women in the Church Study Committee” (10 men and 15 women) met at Camp Mohaven in Danville, Ohio.

At the meeting, papers were read, discussion groups held, and it was voted to authorize the **ordination of women elders** on a restricted, experimental

basis. Although this recommendation was clearly out of harmony with the biblical qualifications of an elder—**husband of one wife**—a good number of participants on the committee agreed that the rite of ordination for women was not prohibited by Scripture nor was it contrary to the writings of Ellen White. Several individuals at that meeting would later figure prominently in the struggle for women’s ordination; individuals such as Leona Running, Kit Watts, Charles Scriven, Raoul Dederen, Betty Stirling, and Madelynn Haldeman.

The report of the Camp Mohaven meeting was taken to the Annual Council in 1974 where the recommendation was made that women **should not be ordained** to the gospel ministry ‘because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a world church which includes in its fellowship peoples of all nations and cultures, and because a survey of its world divisions reveals that **the time is not ripe nor opportune**, therefore, in the interest of the **world unity** of the church, no move be made in the direction of ordaining women to the gospel ministry.’

It will be noticed that the Annual Council of 1974 gave two reasons for the denial of women’s ordination and **neither of them were biblical**. The first was that the time was ‘not ripe nor opportune’ and the second was ‘in the interest of world unity of the church’. These two **non-biblical** reasons would continually come back to haunt the Church.

1975: Spring Meeting (Council) Approves Women Elders in the NAD

In response to the continued pressure from the NAD, church leaders at the 1975 Spring Meeting (where the lion’s share of

the attendees were from North America) approved the **unbiblical** practice of ordaining women as local elders in the NAD if ‘the greatest discretion and caution were exercised.’

I have spoken to individuals who were there when the decision was made and they have told me that the rationale was

The **unbiblical** practice of ordaining women elders **has never been taken to a GC session for approval.**

that there were many small rural churches that had difficulty in securing the services of a male ordained minister or elder to officiate at baptisms and communions. Of course one wonders how the rural churches got along for the previous 115 years of church history (1860-1975)!

It is significant that such an important decision by the Spring Meeting was **not** referred to the GC session in Vienna, Austria in the summer of 1975 or to the session in Dallas in 1980. It was simply a **non-biblical** authorization by the 1975 Spring Meeting.

Several years later—more on this in a few moments—the NAD by its unrelenting pressure, succeeded in persuading church leaders at the 1984 Annual Council to reaffirm and expand the 1975 decision, voting to advise **each division** that it was free to make provisions ‘as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local elders.’

Thus the **unbiblical authorization** in the Spring Meeting of 1975 to ordain women elders in the NAD was expanded by the Annual Council of 1984 to include the world Church.

So, although the 1975 provision

departed from the New Testament model of church leadership that assigns to men, not women, the headship roles of elder or pastor, and even though the world church had **not** formally approved of the provision at a GC session in 1975 or 1980, in 1984 the ordination of women as elders was extended by the Annual Council from the NAD to the world field.

The **unbiblical practice** of ordaining women elders **has never been**

taken to a GC session for approval in more than 40 years, and therefore it is not found in the Church Manual. Being that the current **unbiblical** GC policy authorizing the ordination of women as local elders could not be included in the Church Manual, (because only decisions made by the GC session can be included) it was inserted into the *2009 Seventh-*



day Adventist Minister's Handbook, p. 94 instead: “Elders and deacons should be persons of experience, chosen wisely. By action of the Annual Council [Spring Meeting] of 1975, reaffirmed at the 1984 Annual Council, **both men and women are eligible** to serve as elders and receive ordination to this position of service in the church.”

Thus the first step down the slippery slope of women’s ordination to pastoral leadership was taken when churches were authorized to ordain local women elders. And why was this step so important? Simply because the next step in the process—the **commissioning** of women pastors—required that women be ordained as **local church elders** before they could be commissioned to perform pastoral duties such as officiating at baptisms, marriages and Communion services. It would be absurd to commission women pastors and authorize them to perform pastoral duties unless they were at least ordained as local church elders!

1976: The IRS and Licensed Ministers

Because of parsonage exclusion stipulations of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the GC voted in 1976 (the complete story as told by C. Mervyn Maxwell is available upon request), to allow unordained licensed ministers who had been ordained as local elders to perform weddings and baptisms. In this way they would get a parsonage exclusion from the IRS for tax purposes. Dr. C. Mervyn Maxwell described the response to the allowance by, of all people, some of the GC treasurers: “When some of the treasurers of the General Conference objected, the response of the top leadership was that ‘the difference between the functions of

the licensed and ordained ministry is **not a moral or theological issue**, but a matter of **church policy**, and that the process by which the church trains its ministers obviously is not a matter of theology nor doctrine, but one of methodology, policy.’

Dr. Maxwell continued: “In this way, for the **sake of saving money**, the denomination deprived ordination of much of its distinctiveness. No longer did the General Conference look on ordination as a calling whose nature was determined by **Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy**. No longer was the work of the ordained minister a matter for **theological study**; instead, it was a matter for **committee action and administrative policy**.” (C. Mervyn Maxwell, “How Money Got us into Trouble,” Adventists Affirm, Fall 1998, pp. 18-22.

In 1978 the IRS referred to these unordained ministers who were authorized to perform pastoral duties as ‘**commissioned**’. To make a long story short, this authorization for unordained ministers to perform pastoral duties under the name ‘commissioned’ was at first limited to men but at the 1989 Annual Council it was extended to women, and this is how we got the idea of commissioning women to perform many pastoral duties without pastoral ordination (as long as they were ordained as local church elders and had Seminary training)!

1984: Annual Council Approves Women Elders

Unfortunately a first misstep leads to others and then to still others. The 1975 **unbiblical** decision of the Spring Meeting led to additional **unbiblical** steps. The Bible clearly teaches that elders must be the **husbands of one wife** and they must be **wise rulers in the home**, which in turn qualifies them to be wise leaders

in the church. But on October 14, 1984, as we have seen, the Annual Council voted to extend the authorization to ordain women elders to include the world field.

Here is the official approval of the 1984 Annual Council (Annual Council is the Church's Executive Committee, a group of more than 350 world church leaders.

It is the church's top business meeting other than GC Session, which is held every five years) to allow the ordination of women as local church elders. It will be noticed that Conference and Union leadership today is ignoring virtually all of the provisions that were voted in 1984: 272-84GN, *the 1984 General Conference*

Annual Council action: WOMEN (LOCAL CHURCH) ELDERS: ELECTION AND ORDINATION VOTED,

1. To reaffirm the Spring Meeting action on the General Conference Committee of 1975 *Role of Women in the Church (GCC 75-153).*
2. To advise each division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local elders.
3. To suggest that the following guidelines be used in the selection and ordination of women as local church elders:
 1. The concept should be carefully examined, discussed, and properly accepted at the local church level.
 2. 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.
 3. 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 that cannot be properly fulfilled by a male elder.
 4. 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, the church in a business meeting should take any final action.
 5. 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.

Serious Questions

Serious questions come to mind at this point. Where do we find such a list of stipulations in the Bible? Even more pointedly, where do we find biblical authorization to ordain women as local church elders at all? The answer to both questions is **nowhere!** There is no record in the Bible of any woman ever being ordained as a local church elder or to any other church office! God does not authorize the church to add stipulations to a practice that has no biblical foundation in the first place.

It is noteworthy that some time **before** the San Antonio GC session, GC President Ted Wilson had already explained two things: First, that there is a difference between the ordination of women elders (which was approved in 1975 and 1984) and the ordination of women to pastoral leadership (which had been

First of all, there is **no biblical basis** for the idea that the church can ordain women elders but not women pastors. Denominational policies voted by the GC Executive Committee (Annual Council) might consider these separate items but the Bible makes no such distinction. Neither the Bible nor the Spirit of Prophecy allow for either!

In his inaugural sermon on the second Sabbath of the GC session on July 11, 2015, Elder Wilson repeatedly emphasized that the Bible should be taken 'as it reads.' He also encouraged the world church to study the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy to which I said a hearty amen!

The question is: Where do the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy make a distinction between the ordination of women elders and the ordination of women pastors? One clear biblical qualification for an elder is 'husband of one wife'. We have always understood that this

Where do we find biblical authorization to ordain women as local church elders at all?

disapproved by two GC sessions in 1990 and 1995). Second, he had indicated that decisions that are made at Annual Council are of 'equal weight' as decisions that are made at the GC in Session. Here are his words (with my own explanatory notes in brackets):

"The decision [by the Annual Councils in 1975 and 1984] to ordain women elders is separate [from the issue of the ordination of women pastors] and it [the ordination of women elders] still stands. Women pastors is a different item [than the ordination of women elders]. The decision voted at Annual Council or at the General Conference is of equal weight."

qualification applies equally to elders and pastors. In fact, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 is used as the Scripture reading for both the ordination of local elders and the ordination of pastors. In order for the church to be consistent with Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, it would have to disallow both the ordination of women elders and women pastors.

In Elder Wilson's defense, there is clear evidence that he did not necessarily agree with the idea that there is a difference between the ordination of women elders and women pastors. The evidence (to be presented shortly) indicates that he was simply stating what had been voted at previous Annual Councils.

Regarding Elder Wilson's second point I would ask: Do the decisions made at the Annual Council have the 'same weight' as decisions that are made at the GC Session? Do the Annual Council decisions in 1975 and 1984 to allow for the ordination women elders have 'equal weight' as decisions that are made at the GC Session? More pointedly, is the authorization to ordain women elders by the Annual Council in 1984 of 'equal weight' as a vote by the GC in Session? Let's take a closer look at the matter.

The GC Spring Meeting in 1975 could have suggested that the matter of ordaining women elders be placed on the agenda of the 1975 GC session in Vienna, Austria, but it did not. The Annual Council of 1979 could have placed it on the agenda for the 1980 GC session in Dallas, but it did not. Likewise, the Annual Council of 1984 (where the authorization was 'glo-

is no turning back from the decisions that were made in 1975 and 1984. There is too much pressure from the NAD, and it is perceived that there are already too many women elders in place to turn back! It is perceived that a 'no' vote at the world session would cause a traumatic division in the church. The perception is that it is best to leave 'well enough' alone even though 'well enough' is not well!

In order to better understand the difference between the level of authority of Annual Council as compared with the GC in session it would be helpful to remember that the Church on a global level functions in a very similar manner, as does the local Church on a smaller scale. Let's take a look at how the denominational machinery works on the local church level.

In the local church, the church board serves as the "executive committee" of the church and acts as the decision-making body between yearly church business sessions. The church board does not have unbridled decision-making authority. Its authority is delegated to it by the totality of the local church membership. In other words, the authority of the church board is ultimately beholden to the authority of the entire church in business, particularly when extremely important decisions must be made. The church in business has the authority to trump and even overturn decisions that have been taken by the church board.

You might ask: What does this have

The fundamental problem is that the decision to approve the ordination of women elders was never voted on by the world church.

to do with the 1975 and 1984 Annual Council (GC Executive Committee) authorization to ordain women elders? Let me explain what is probably already obvious.

On all levels—local Church, Conference, Union and GC—the SDA denomination functions in a similar fashion. The 'executive committees' or boards at each level carry on the administrative matters of their region in between business sessions. Thus on a global scale, the Annual Council (GC Executive Committee) does the business of the world church between sessions much as the church board does on a local church level.

But, as stated before, Executive Committees that operate between sessions do not have unbridled decision-making authority. Their authority is beholden to the authority of the entire constituency in business. Thus, the authority of the church in business is greater than the authority of the church board. This is how the Church Manual puts it: "*The business meeting has authority over the board and may delegate responsibilities to the board in addition to those already assigned by the Church Manual.*" *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, (2010 Edition), "Business Meetings, p. 124

On the level of the world church, a member or group of members have the right to question decisions that were made by the GC Executive Committee (Annual Council), and by following the proper procedures can suggest that the matter be placed on the agenda for the

delegates of the world church to consider at the next GC Session.

What does this mean in practical terms in the context of the discussion on women's ordination? It simply means that the unbiblical decisions that were made by the Spring Meeting in 1975 and the Annual Council (GC Executive Committee) in 1984 to allow for the ordination of women elders can be (and should be!) legitimately questioned and brought to the floor for a vote by the world church.

The fundamental problem is that the decision to approve the ordination of women elders was never voted on by the world church. And as I have previously shown, the ordination of women elders was the indispensable first step that allowed for the commissioning of women pastors.

I am well aware that the Church Manual states that: "*The General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the administration of the Church*" Church Manual, p. 31.

I believe that the GC Executive Committee actions are important, but in the light of the way the church functions, they don't rise to the same level of authority as the decisions of the delegates of the world church gathered in GC session. If the Executive Committee has the same level of authority as the GC Session, then why have a GC Session at all? Why not simply allow the Executive Committee to make all of the decisions

In order for the church to be consistent with Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, it would have to disallow both the ordination of women elders and women pastors.

balized') could have decided to place the matter on the agenda of the 1985 session in New Orleans, but it did not! Further, the item could have been placed on the agenda for the 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 or 2015 GC sessions, but it wasn't.

Why hasn't the Annual Council authorization to ordain women elders been taken before the world body for a vote in the last 40 years? I believe it is because the Annual Council knows that it would not pass, and they feel that there

as well as write all of the policies and save much time and millions of dollars?

A persuasive case can be made that when Ellen White wrote that “*God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority*” (*Gospel Workers*, p. 490),

Why hasn't the Annual Council authorization to ordain women elders been taken before the world body for a vote in the last 40 years?

she was not referring to the decisions that are made by the GC Executive Committee between sessions, but rather to the decisions that are made by the delegates of the entire world church gathered in GC session.

A number of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) members as well as many other persons and organizations have questioned the decisions of the Executive Committee (Annual Council) in 1975 and 1984 on this matter and were hoping that a motion would be brought to the delegates in San Antonio to rescind the authorization to ordain women elders. But Elder Wilson, even before the debate began, pleaded that no amendments be added to the motion, so in respect to his request none were offered.

No doubt, Elder Wilson had good reasons to request that no amendments be attached to the motion at that time, reasons that will become clearer as time passes. Hopefully there is a plan to discuss the entire matter of the **biblical** roles of men and women in the church at a future Annual Council. Only time will tell.

1985: No General Conference Vote on Women Elders

As we have seen, though the 1984 Annual Council voted to allow world divisions to implement the **unbiblical** practice of ordaining women elders, the decision was not brought to the world body for a vote in New Orleans in 1985 and therefore **the practice of ordaining women elders was not included in The Church Manual**—where it is absent to this very day!

It would have been logical for the Annual Council in 1984 to place the matter of the ordination of women elders on the agenda of the 1985 New Orleans GC session but it did not. The question that begs to be asked is why? Was it simply an oversight? Was it because of the intense pressure of the NAD? Was there a fear that the delegates would render a robust ‘no’ or that there was too much water under the bridge to reverse the decision that had been made in 1975?

J. R. Spangler, who at the time was the secretary of the GC Ministerial Association, had some interesting things to say about the 1985 GC session and the events that led up to it: “*At the New Orleans General Conference session an action was taken requesting the North American Division committee to ‘clarify the functions of ministerial workers who hold ministerial licenses, including how such functions relate to women who serve as pastors or associates in pastoral care, and to request that a complete proposal on roles and procedures be submitted by the North American Division [NAD] to the 1985 Annual Council for consideration.’*

*On October 8, the North American Division committee met in response to this directive and gave study to a **proposed policy** dealing with associates in pastoral care that would **exclude them from baptizing and solemnizing marriages.***

*This exclusion can be traced back to a recommendation by a committee that met prior to the General Conference session and dealt with the role of women in the church. The General Conference delegates accepted their recommendation, which was passed by the 1985 Spring Council. In that report it was voted ‘to take no definite action at this time regarding the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.’ Further study was to be given the subject, and a special representative committee would be scheduled to meet **early in 1988** with its findings to be presented in a report to the **1988 Spring Meeting** of the General Conference Committee and subsequently to the **1989 Annual Council**, at which time the entire issue would be reviewed.*

One statement in this voted recommendation was ‘to maintain the church’s present position on this matter.’

*In the October 8 **NAD meeting**, a proposal was introduced to delete the portion of the policy that excludes associates in pastoral care **from baptizing and solemnizing marriages.** After a lengthy and heated discussion, it was voted ‘to refer to the General Conference officers for further study and counsel the proposal that associates in pastoral care be permitted to baptize and solemnize marriages.’*

*Following this, the General Conference, division officers, and union presidents considered the request of the North American Division committee for counsel. Again there was a healthy discussion, and the final vote **rejected the request that associates in pastoral care be permitted***

to baptize and solemnize marriages.” J. R. Spangler, “Ministry Reports—Annual Council 1985,” *Ministry Magazine*, December, 1985

The GC session in 1985 decided to leave the ordination policy unchanged, thus barring women from being ordained to the gospel ministry. And, as Elder Spangler explained, at a meeting of GC Administrators, Division officers, and Union presidents, much to the chagrin of the NAD, it was voted to disallow commissioned women (associates in pastoral care) to perform baptisms and marriages. Of course, this did not sit well with many leaders in the NAD and within a short period, they worked to reverse the decision.

1988-1989: Women’s Commission’s Two Point Proposal

In response to the request of the 1985 GC session that the NAD committee ‘clarify the functions of ministerial workers who hold ministerial licenses, including how such functions relate to women who serve as pastors or associates in pastoral care, and to request that a complete proposal on roles and procedures be submitted by the North American Division [NAD] to the 1985 Annual Council for consideration’, the General Conference leadership appointed a group consisting of 67 members (50 men and 17 women) that met in Cohutta Springs, Georgia, on July 12-18, 1989 to discuss a series of papers that had been written for the occasion and to make a recommendation to the 1989 Annual Council on the way forward. The Annual Council would then refer the recommendation to the 1990 GC Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.

On July 16, 1989, the “Commission on

the Role of Women”, by a vote 56 to 11, made a two-point recommendation to the 1989 Annual Council. The GC President, Neal C. Wilson, who, according to the Adventist Review (August 3, 1989, p. 6) was also the chair of the NAD “Commission on the Role of Women,” made it clear that the two points of the proposal could not be voted on separately but rather together. In other words, it was **all or nothing**.

Here is the two-point proposal that eventually went to the Annual Council:

(1) “We do not recommend authorization for women to be ordained to the gospel ministry.” (Adventist Review, July 13, 1990, p. 8)

(2) If they meet certain qualifications (i.e., Seminary training and **local elder ordination**), women can perform essentially ALL the functions of an ordained minister, but only within their local churches.

Laurel Damsteegt, who was a member of the Commission, describes the climactic moment right before the vote was taken: “Suddenly it seemed we were in a terrible rush to be done. We were divided into small groups, each with a General Conference Administrator in charge, and given only thirty minutes to discuss the proposal’s ramifications. And we were so much as told that the proposal could not be altered, or its parts voted on as separate components. It either flew as a whole package or our time at Cohutta was in vain. And really, there was no time to think it through.” Laurel Damsteegt, “Loyalty,” Adventists Affirm, Fall 1989.

This was a case of ‘having your cake and eating it too’. Those who were opposed to the ordination of women to pastoral ministry would get half a bone

(no pastoral ordination for women) and those who were in favor would get the other half (women could perform essentially the same functions as ordained pastors). It seems like the members of the Commission felt that it was better for each group to get half a bone rather than no bone at all and therefore most voted for it. The two-point proposal was intended to please both groups but it pleased neither! (For an eyewitness account of this meeting Lauren Damsteegt’s article available upon request).

Carlos Medley, writing in the Adventist Review November 9, 1989, p. 6 stated that at Annual Council neither group was happy with the two-point proposal: “Those for ordination are not for the document because it doesn’t call for ordination. Those against ordination of women are turned off because it allows women to perform essentially the same functions as ordained ministers.”

Dr. Roy Adams added his testimony regarding the two-point proposal that was brought before the 1989 Annual Council: “At that point ... those favoring the ordination of women instinctively realized that a half loaf was better than none at all. Thereupon began an intense effort to hang on to the bird in hand ... in the face of the not-so-subtle attempt by some to snatch it away by taking up the commission’s two-point recommendation separately rather than together.” (The Adventist Review, February 1, 1990)

What Dr. Adams is saying is that if the two proposals had been voted on separately rather than together, neither of them would have passed and those who favored women’s ordination would have been deprived of their half a bone!

But commissioned women would not even get a complete half bone! There were

three ministerial functions that commissioned women would not be allowed to perform. These three were: Ordaining local elders and deacons, organizing churches and serving as a conference president on any level of church organization. The question is: Where do the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy make such distinctions? Is this not a mere human tradition designed to please both sides and keep the peace?

This **unbiblical** and discriminatory ‘third option’ compromise at Annual Council (not a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the two proposals but a ‘no’ to the first and a ‘yes’ to the second) opened up a proverbial ‘can of worms’. After all, what possible sense did it make for the Annual Council to authorize the **unbiblical** practice of unordained commissioned women performing some pastoral duties and not others? And even more pointedly, where did the Bible make an allowance for commissioned women without pastoral ordination to perform **any** ministerial duties? What then was the meaning and purpose of ordination? Did the compromise mean that the work of ordained male pastors was officially recognized by the church while the work of female commissioned pastors was not? When biblical injunctions are ignored, changed, adjusted, rejected or delayed, the result is confusion! How simple appears the biblical injunction for elders and pastors to be ‘husbands of one wife’!

1989: Two Point Proposal Referred to the GC Session

As expected, the Annual Council on October 9, 1989 accepted the two-point proposal and placed it on the agenda for a vote at the GC Session in 1990. The second point of the proposal stated:

“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.”*

But instead of the two points of the proposal being voted on together as they had been at the Cohutta Springs meeting, the Annual Council decided that each proposal would be taken up separately at the 1990 GC session on two successive days.

1990: No to Ordination and Yes to Women Pastors

Emboldened by their success in influencing church leaders to allow for the **unbiblical practice** of ordaining women elders, those who favored women’s ordination then proceeded to attempt to overturn the Annual Council’s first proposal by urging the world church in GC session to allow for the ordination of women as pastors.

When the delegates met at Indianapolis in 1990, they were presented on Wednesday, July 10, 1990 with the first half of the Commission’s recommendation (denying pastoral ordination to women). Here is the motion that the Annual Council passed on to the 1990 GC Session: “While the commission does

not have a consensus as to whether or not the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral minis-

When biblical injunctions are ignored, changed, adjusted, rejected or delayed, the result is confusion!

try, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide-ranging, and continued ministry for women which is being expressed and will be evidenced in the varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Further, in view of the **widespread lack of support** for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world Church and in view of the possible **risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry.**

It will be noticed once again, that the rationale for disallowing the ordination of women as pastors was not 'because it is not in harmony with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.' No! The selfsame reasons had been heard before: There is 'widespread lack of support' and a 'risk of possible disunity, dissension and diversion from the mission of the church.' The reasons were pragmatic rather than biblical! In fact, they were good reasons but the fundamental reason, a 'thus saith the Lord' was left out!

Despite the impassioned pleas of the NAD delegates, the representatives from the world church on July 11, 1990 overwhelmingly voted to accept the Annual Council's recommendation that denied the ordination of women to pastoral

leadership. And so, the first part of the two-point proposal was soundly rejected by a vote of 1,173 to 377.

But what happened to the second point of the proposal? Here is where the story gets very interesting and takes many twists and turns. Whereas

those who attended the Cohutta Springs meeting were required to vote the two-points of the proposal together, at the GC Session in Indianapolis the two points were deliberately taken up separately on two successive days.

It would have been quite simple for the 1989 Annual Council to suggest that both proposals be voted on together at the GC session. Why wasn't it done? The reason is obvious. Those who favored women's ordination knew that if the two proposals were presented together, both would have been overwhelmingly voted down and those who favored women's ordination would have been denied their half a bone! The pro-ordination group preferred to get their half a bone and live on to fight another day for the other half!

The delegates of the world field were anxious and ready to vote on the first proposal and, as we have seen, ordination was denied to women by a supermajority of 75% of the delegates. But many of the delegates little realized the importance of the second point of the proposal (allowing commissioned women to perform essentially the same pastoral duties as men as long as they were locally ordained elders and had seminary training) that would be brought to the floor for a vote the next day.

The grueling 10-day Session was near-

ing its end. Most of the delegates had come to Indianapolis well prepared to vote 'no' on the first point; and, since it had been voted down, many delegates, certain that the important vote had been taken the day before, were absent from the main auditorium when the second recommendation was unexpectedly presented. The derelict delegates who went sightseeing and shopping instead of fulfilling their duty little realized that the second point of the proposal was just as important at the first.

Actually, Elder Neal C. Wilson and others even suggested that the second point of the proposal was being brought to the session mainly as an informational item because at the 1985 GC session the NAD had been given a mandate to deal with the matter of women's ordination. Shortly after the 1989 Annual Council had voted to allow women to perform pastoral duties without pastoral ordination Elder Neal C. Wilson explained: "This second provision **became final** at the 1989 Annual Council by a vote of 190-46 and **takes effect immediately**. This allows female ministers ... to baptize and to perform marriages ..." (*The Adventist Review*, November 9, 1989, p. 6).

Thus, according to Elder Neal C. Wilson, the 1990 session merely had to rubberstamp the second of the two-point proposals because the Annual Council had already been given the authority to make the **final** decision beforehand. In fact, Elder Wilson explained that when the Annual Council approved the second point of the proposal he understood that the NAD was immediately authorized to begin commissioning women to perform pastoral duties without pastoral ordination. In his own words at the GC session: "The understanding we [the NAD]

had by taking this action at the previous General Conference session [in 1985] was that North America should work on this matter, because there were both men and women equally prepared, equally trained. The North American Division was to make a full **report** to the 1989 ... Annual Council ... **It was understood that the action of the 1989 council would be final.**" (*The Adventist Review*, July 17, 1990, p. 13)

Elder Meade C. Van Putten just a few minutes later concurred: "I just wish to remind the chair and this body that this is a **report** that was to be final with the 1989 Annual Council. It is simply a **report** to be made to this body at this time, and therefore **does not require any debate or vote.**" (*The Adventist Review*, July 17, 1990, pp. 13, 14)

And Calvin B. Rock stated as much to the delegates: "You gave Annual Council the authority to make that decision [whether to allow women to perform pastoral duties without ordination]." (*Adventist Review*, July 17, p. 17)

The question is: Why was the vote on proposal # 2 final at the 1989 Annual Council and not the vote on proposal # 1? And further, if the decision of the 1989 Annual Council on proposal # 2 were final then why would it even be necessary to bring it up at the 1990 GC session?

There was a good reason. The Annual Council is not authorized to add anything to *The Church Manual*. This being the case, the inclusion of the various pastoral duties that women would be allowed to perform without ordination would have to be included in the Manual by the delegates at the world session.

The bottom line is that the absentee delegates of the world church would have never voted to include these items



in The Church Manual if they had been present. My wife's brother-in-law, Pastor Norberto Carmona, who at the time was a conference president and delegate from Colombia, stayed at his post of duty and spoke against the proposal to no avail—the delegates from the NAD were all there but the rest of the world was scantily represented.

By way of example, when the vote was taken to include in The Church Manual that 'commissioned' women could perform the marriage ceremony, the vote was 'yes' 776 and 'no' 494. Let's do the math. There were about 2500 delegates at the 1990 GC session in 1990 but only 1270 voted. This means that 1230 delegates were missing when the vote was taken (The Adventist Review, July 26-August 2, 1990, p. 13).

Those who were observing the deliberations (I was one of them) can attest that there was much confusion and dissent on the floor. The various items were voted on by number rather than explicitly explaining the issue that was being voted. Objections were brought to the floor and ignored. Delegates from the NAD monopolized the microphones so that delegates from the world field would not be able to opine. R. R. Standish, a delegate from Singapore, complained: "I was distressed yesterday to see a number of individuals from the North American Division using the microphone to deny the rest of the world the slightest opportunity to express their opinions." (The Adventist Review, July 17, 1990, p. 17)

He added in frustration: "Many of us are wearied by decisions made not by the world church, but by headquarters. We have the ordination of women elders. We now have the performance of ministerial duties by women. I would plead that we

stop taking actions and making them final and trying to deprive the world church of its proper input." (The Adventist Review, July 17, 1990)

Delegate D. R. Blythe complained: "I believe that if we pass this action we will indeed be moving toward disunity ... I believe that what we see here is a ploy for us to reverse the rejection of the ordination of women, because very soon it will be argued that we cannot allow women to perform in all of these functions without giving them the recognition of ordination." (The Adventist Review, July 17, 1990, p. 17)

In conclusion, a good argument could be made that the decision to allow women to perform ministerial functions without ordination was made by the NAD at Cohutta Springs and by the Annual Council of 1989 much as the decision to ordain women elders was made by the pressure of the NAD at the 1975 and 1984 Annual Councils!

Was the vote against women's ordination to pastoral leadership respected by the NAD in the aftermath of Indianapolis? Hardly! Within less than a month after the decision, the Sligo Church, located only a few miles from world headquarters, in defiance ordained several women pastors. Not long after, La Sierra University Church followed suit. Since then many more have been ordained in various places. Obviously, North America was not satisfied with their half a bone.

1995: GC Session Says 'No' to Women's Ordination—Again!

The refusal of the GC session to approve women's ordination on a global level at the 1990 GC session led the NAD to

take a special request to the 1994 Annual Council. This request, to allow the NAD to ordain women to the gospel ministry in their own territory, was placed on the agenda of the 1995 GC Session in Utrecht, Netherlands. This was the NAD's proposal: "The General Conference vests in each division the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policy. In addition, where circumstances do not deem it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committee takes specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions."

On July 5, 1995 the world church answered the NAD's request with a resounding no! Sixty-six percent of the delegates (1,481 to 673) voted 'no' to the NAD's request to allow women's ordination to pastoral leadership in its territory; but once again nothing was done about the Annual Council's 1984 decision to allow women to be ordained as local church elders.

It is important to underline that on August 3, 1995 Elder Alfred C. McClure, the President of the NAD, sent an open letter to all NAD administrators and pastors stating that "a **commissioning** or **dedicatory service**, **even with the laying on of hands**, is biblical and affirming of the call to ministry (see Acts 13:2-4 and Review and Herald, July 9 1895), yet does not violate the spirit or the letter of the vote of the General Conference session."

What Elder McClure did not clarify is that Acts 13:2-4 was actually referring to the **ordination** of Paul and Barnabas rather than their commissioning. Jesus

had **commissioned** Paul on the road to Damascus and his **ordination** was the official recognition by the church of that fact (Acts 26:16-18). Christ commissions and the church then ordains those who fit the Biblical criteria. Ellen White clearly made a distinction between commissioning and ordaining: "Thousands might be at work who are **not ordained** to preach the gospel, but **are commissioned of Christ** to do His work. To every man He has given his work." Manuscript Releases, volume 16, p. 37

Further, Elder McClure failed to mention that Ellen White's quote in the 1895 Review and Herald had to do with the ordination of deaconesses, not pastors. By laying hands on women and calling it 'commissioning', the NAD seemed to pay regard to the letter of the 1995 GC vote but at the same time violated its spirit.

2010: Approval of Deaconess Ordination

At the Atlanta GC Session in 2010 the ordination of deaconesses was approved and included in The Church Manual. The question that begs to be asked once again is this: Why was the ordination of deaconesses brought to the floor for a vote and not the ordination of women elders? Was a vote on the ordination of deaconesses of greater weight than a vote on the ordination of women elders?

The 2010 edition of the Church Manual states: "Ordination Service for Deaconesses – Such a service would be carried out by an ordained pastor currently credentialed by the conference. The ordination service should be characterized by simplicity and performed in the presence of the church. If they retain church membership, deaconesses do not have to be ordained again if they move their mem-

bership to other churches. When the term for which they were elected expires, they must be reelected if they are to continue as deaconesses” (pp. 78, 79). “The nominating committee brings in nominations to fill the various church offices. When these have been elected, the elders should be ordained unless they have already been ordained as elders. A similar but shorter service should take place for ordination of deacons and deaconesses.” (p. 38).

2010-2011: The Change in E-60

The *General Conference Working Policy*, in harmony with the decisions of the world church, clearly reserves ordination to the gospel ministry to the male gender: “The appointment of individuals to serve as Bible instructors or chaplains, or in departmental or pastoral responsibilities, shall not be limited by race or color.

the envelope still further. The South-eastern California Conference (SECC) in the Pacific Union Conference (PUC) had indicated for some time that they intended to elect a woman as a conference president but the *General Conference Working Policy E-60* stood in the way. What was the proposed solution to the problem? Not to abide by the policy but rather to change it’s wording!!

On November 7, 2010 the NAD Executive Committee voted to make a subtle but significant change in the Working Policy that governs the operations of the NAD as part of the GC. Section E-60 of the Working Policy reads:

“E 60 Conference/Mission President
Inasmuch as the conference/mission president stands at the head of the ministry in the conference/mission and is the chief elder, or overseer of all the churches, a conference/mission president should be

Why was the ordination of deaconesses brought for a vote and not the ordination of women elders? Was a vote on the ordination of deaconesses of greater weight than a vote on the ordination of women elders?

Neither shall these positions be limited by gender (except those requiring ordination to the gospel ministry.” General Conference Working Policy, 2013-2014 edition, p. 113

In spite of this clear policy that is founded on the Bible, the writings of Ellen White, the practice of the pioneers and two votes by the world church (in 1990 and 1995), some conferences and unions had been ordaining women to the gospel ministry for years.

But now, the NAD wanted to push

an **ordained** minister.”

The NAD Executive Committee added only one word but the change was very significant:

“E 60 Conference/Mission President
Inasmuch as the conference/mission president stands at the head of the ministry in the conference/mission and is the chief elder, or overseer of all the churches, a conference/mission president should be an ordained/commissioned minister.”

It was the addition of the one word ‘commissioned’ to policy E-60 that res-

urrected and precipitated the present chapter of the women’s ordination crisis in the NAD.

Because the church at the 1990 GC session had already rubberstamped the commissioning of women, the addition of the word ‘commissioned’ by the NAD Executive Committee would now make it possible for commissioned women to serve as conference presidents, a function which previously belonged only to ordained male pastors with a ministerial credential. The NAD executive committee reaffirmed this change in 2010 and 2011.

2012: The E-60 Change Removed

But a problem surfaced. The GC General Counsel informed the NAD Executive Committee on January 3, 2012 that they had no legal authority to establish policies that are out of harmony with the *GC Model Constitution* or *GC Working Policy* because individual divisions do not have their own constituencies—they are divisions of the GC as a whole. On January 31, Elder Jackson sent a letter to the NAD members that stated in part: “... the North American Division Executive Committee does not have the right to establish policies which are out of harmony with the *General Conference Model Constitution* or *General Conference Working Policy*.”

Each of the 13 world divisions is actually a part of the GC structure as a whole, and as such, its constituency is composed of the delegates of the entire world field. In short, in order for the NAD to make the change, they would need the support of its constituency—the world church!

As a result, the NAD was reluctantly forced to remove the change. The Administration of the NAD took full

responsibility for failing to do sufficient research into the constitutional issues that impacted their decision. In bringing this matter to the NAD Executive Committee in 2010 and 2011 they stated that they were doing so under the assumption that the NAD had a constituency separate and distinct from the GC. Unfortunately, they were wrong and they apologized for the oversight.

It bears noting, however, that the apology was not for the intention of electing a conference president of the female gender but rather for the failure to follow the constitutional stipulation that forbade them to do so.

On January 31, 2012 (released on February 6), Elder Dan Jackson wrote a letter to the NAD membership explaining that the NAD did not have the authority to make the change that had been extant since 2010. Among other things, Elder Jackson made the following statement in the letter: “*With specific reference to some of the concerns expressed to us in recent discussions, we strongly assert that neither the NAD Administration nor the NADCOM have ‘rebelled’ against any vote of the General Conference, nor has it been their intention to do so.*”

If this is the case, why did the NAD change E-60? The facts speak for themselves. There is clear evidence that by changing the wording in the first place, the NAD was surreptitiously attempting to circumvent the decisions that the world church had made at two GC sessions with the purpose of allowing for the election of a female conference president. And when a female conference president was elected in the SECC in open violation of E-60 there was not a whimper of protest from the NAD Administration.

In the second half of his letter, Elder



Jackson suggested that the NAD could learn many lessons from this experience. One does not have to read between the lines of these ‘many lessons’ to understand that the NAD was determined to get its way in this matter. Among the future strategies suggested by Elder Jackson to the membership of the NAD was: “We must also develop intentional methods of mentoring women who can take on executive leadership positions within our conferences.”

2012: PUC Special Constituency’s Intentional Methods

It did not take long for those intentional methods to bear fruit. In fact, it only took a few months. Now that the NAD knew that it could do nothing on the division level, they chose to work on the union and conference levels instead. Those who favored women’s ordination knew that unions and conferences do have local constituencies so they decided to work on those levels to seek approval for the ordination of women to pastoral leadership and issue them ministerial credentials. With ordination and ministerial credentials, women could become full-fledged ministers and even conference presidents.

This new intentional method of circumventing the vote of the world church is exemplified by decisions made at the 2012 Columbia and PUC special constituency sessions.

The PUC session took place on August 19, 2012 where there were two items on the agenda:

- A change in the Union’s bylaws and
- The approval of women’s ordination to pastoral leadership.

The meeting was quite conflictive and reminded me more of a political convention than a church meeting. There was limited theological discussion because the meeting began at 1 pm and ended at 5 pm. With all the preliminaries, points of order and speeches, the time for debate lasted for barely two hours.

A little history would be helpful. On May 22, 2012 my conference secretary forwarded me a document from the PUC where the intent of the constituency meeting was explained (the complete document was later published in The Pacific Union Recorder, June 2012, p. 4, 5). The title of the document was “Union Committee Calls Special Constituency Session to Authorize Ordinations Without Regard to Gender.” It was composed of three parts: The (1) Preamble that was approved by the Union Committee, (2) a Main Motion and (3) the Process to be followed.

It bears noting that the Union did not call this session to decide whether to ordain women. The document reveals in several ways that the desired outcome of the session had already been decided before the meeting. The title of the document did not state that the constituency would decide whether to ordain women. It clearly stated that it intended to approve the ordination of women.

Early in 2012 (after the E-60 change was disallowed), the PUC administration decided to move forward to authorize the ordination of candidates ‘without regard to gender’ contrary to the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, the will of the world church and denominational policy. But the administrators and the PUC Executive Committee saw their own bylaws as a potential obstacle. You see, the bylaws of the PUC in Article III in the section

titled, “Relationships” clearly states:

“The Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is a part of the North American Division, which in turn is a part of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, a world church organization.”

“All policies, purposes, and procedures of this Union shall be in harmony with the working policies and procedures of the North American Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.”

The preemptive move to approve the ordination of candidates ‘without regard to gender’ in contradiction to the will of the world church at Indianapolis and Utrecht would put the PUC at odds with its own bylaws. Instead of abiding by their bylaws, the union officers proposed to change them to state: “In general, the policies, purposes and procedures of the Union will be in harmony with the working policies and procedures of the North American Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.”

In a communication to the constituency delegates, a church member correctly perceived the serious implications of this change: “*This bylaw will have effectively been changed from a command to comply with GC and NAD policy into a non-binding description of what the policies will generally be. Obviously, these changes go far beyond female ordination. If you approve this bylaw change, you will give the Pacific Union permission not to comply with NAD and GC policies and procedures whenever it chooses not to comply. This is essentially secession from the world church.”*

The church leaders in a prominent church in the SECC perceived the same danger. A letter dated July 27, 2012 that was addressed to Ricardo Graham

(President of PUC) and Gerald Penick (president of the SECC at the time) stated in part: “We believe that the proposed change to the bylaws has such serious ramifications for the future of the churches in the Pacific Union Conference in a much broader scope than the current issue of ordination policy, that we urge Leadership and Executive Committees to reexamine the process that is being used to expand ordination policy and seek process solutions that are not based on a philosophy of congregationalism, either intentionally or unintentionally.

A vote to change the bylaws as proposed would certainly be seen as a victory by some well-meaning people; however, if it happens, we believe it will be ‘sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the belly’, and potentially create a major fracture in the church.”

The thinking of the PUC leadership seemed to be: If our desired practices are out of line with the rules, then change the rules! To get their way, they attempted to change their bylaws in a similar way that the NAD had previously attempted to do with E-60.

A minority of the delegates at the constituency session wondered: What guarantee do we have that the PUC Executive Committee will not flex its muscles in other areas of church policy? If the constituency voted to approve ordinations without regard to gender in contradiction to the union’s own bylaws, what would keep them from doing the same in other areas of church life? Was it enough for the leadership to say: “trust us”? Had they proved themselves worthy of the constituency’s trust? What if, for example, down the road the PUC decided not to send on to the higher organizations the percentage of tithe required by

the Working Policy? The revised bylaws would have presumably allowed them to do so if they wished. And what if, down the road, the Union decided to authorize gay marriage?

Thankfully and providentially, the constituency of the PUC, by the slim margin of four votes, (65% to 35%) voted not to change the bylaws, a decision that was followed by an audible groan by those who were counting on the change. One more percentage point and the women's ordination lobby would have had the two thirds majority required to change the bylaws!

When the vote to change the bylaws failed by just four votes, the Central California Conference president courageously stood up to question whether the session could go forward with the second motion to ordain candidates without regard to gender. He argued that to do so would be illegal because the bylaws required that: ***All policies, purposes, and procedures of this Union shall be in harmony with the working policies and procedures of the North American Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.***

But the parliamentarians assured the chair that it would be perfectly proper to go ahead with the second vote, quickly disposing of the conference president's point of order. Notably, the parliamentarians were attorneys that were remunerated by the Union, which was a clear conflict of interest. After all, you don't bite the hand that feeds you!

When the vote was taken, a supermajority (79% to 21%) voted in favor of women's ordination contrary to two votes of the world church, the pleas of three GC Officers who were present (Ted Wilson, Armando Miranda and Lowell Cooper)

and the Union's own bylaws. Dan Jackson, the NAD president was there and offered not a single word of protest! And a NAD vice-president, in the presence of hundreds of delegates pointed his finger in Elder Wilson's face and in a loud and accusatory tone blamed him for the vote that was about to be taken. In the vice-president's view, if Elder Wilson had allowed the change in E-60 to ride, the PUC would not have called the constituency meeting. This provides clear evidence that the PUC Special Constituency was one of the 'intentional methods' that Elder Jackson had addressed in his letter to the members of the NAD.

With regards to the women's ordination issue, some delegates wondered what was meant by the phrase, 'without regard to gender'? Would this expression allow trans-genders to be set apart for the gospel ministry? What about gays, lesbians and transsexuals? Would the expression 'without regard to gender' include them?

When the constituency session ended, the question that rang in my ears was this: How long will it be before this issue is revisited in a PUC constituency session? The tone of the meeting indicated that the issue would not be laid to rest until those who favor a change in the bylaws get their way!

But it is important to underline that a change in the bylaws would have been illegal anyway because Articles III and IV of the PUC bylaws clearly state:

RELATIONSHIPS

The Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is part of the North American Division that in turn is a part of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, a world church organization.

All policies, purposes and procedures of this Union shall be in harmony with

the working policies and procedures of the North American Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

This Union shall pursue the purposes of the Church in harmony with the doctrines, programs, and initiatives adopted and approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Constituency Session."

Thus according to its own bylaws, the PUC is constitutionally obligated to abide by the decisions and policies of the world church. In the SDA organizational system, the divisions are part of the GC, the Unions are part of the Divisions, the Conferences are part of the Unions and the local Churches are part of the Conferences. No entity is authorized to go its own way contrary to the will of the entire body.

The other Union in the NAD that approved the ordination of women was the CUC. A special constituency meeting was called for July 29, 2012 with the specific purpose of approving the ordination of candidates without regard to gender. After the union constituency voted in favor, the Pennsylvania Conference, which is part of the CUC, voted to abide by its bylaws that forbade such a move. Here is the official statement:

"The recent Columbia Union Special Constituency Session regarding ordination without regard to gender has led to some questions from those wondering how this might affect the Pennsylvania Conference and its future actions.

The Pennsylvania Conference Officers have carefully reviewed the action of the Columbia Union Session, and have reviewed the Pennsylvania Conference Constitution and By-laws. While the Columbia Union has a more general wording in its by-laws, the Pennsylvania Conference has very specific wording,

which we will abide by. This wording states that the Pennsylvania Conference policies and procedures shall be in harmony with the working policies and procedures of the North American Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

It is our belief that according to this wording we as a Conference will follow only that which the General Conference policy provides for, in regard to ordination. Our Pennsylvania Conference Constitution and By-laws Committee is not recommending a change in this wording to the Pennsylvania Conference Constituency Session this Fall." Pennsylvania Conference Constitution, article 3, voted 2009

This willingness of the Pennsylvania Conference to abide by their bylaws is to be commended, and it stands in stark contrast to the actions of the PUC constituency on August 19, 2012. Instead of abiding by its bylaws, the PUC sought to change them in order to 'legally' allow for ordinations without regard to gender. When they were unable to change the bylaws, they went on ahead and violated them. Actually, the PUC had already been violating its own bylaws for many years and was simply seeking to *ex-post-facto* put its bylaws in harmony with its illegal practices.

2012: Upstart Unions Reprimanded by the Annual Council

The decision of the Pacific and Columbia Unions to go ahead with the ordination of women pastors led the Annual Council of 2012 to reprimand them for making a unilateral decision before the Theology of Ordination study Committee (TOSC) had finished its work. The reprimand vote was 264-25. Here is a

GC Session ACTIONS

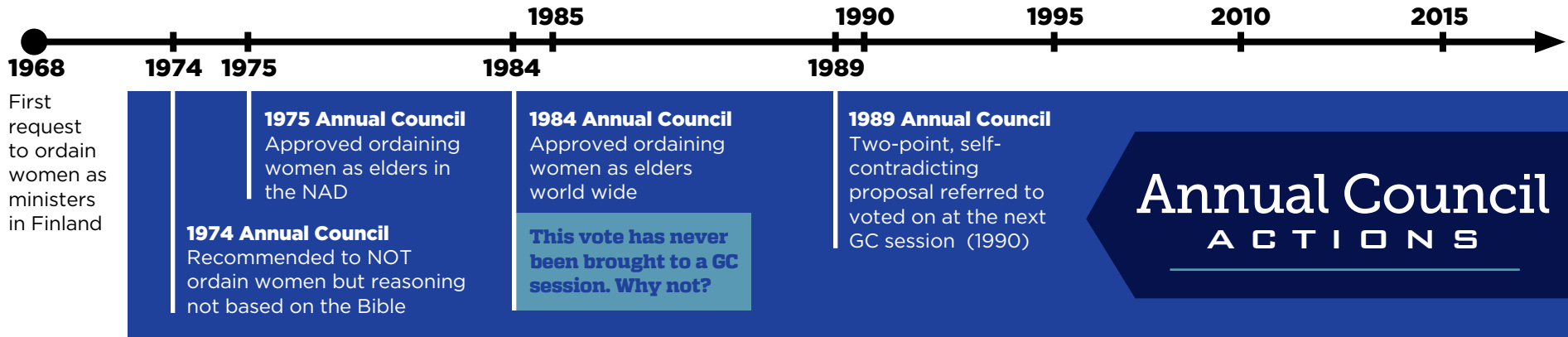
1985 GC Session
No vote taken on ordaining women as elders

1990 GC Session
Voted NO to ordaining women as ministers but YES to allowing women to function as ministers

1995 GC Session
Voted NO to allowing the NAD to ordain women as ministers

2010 GC Session
Voted YES to ordaining women as deaconesses

2015 GC Session
Voted NO to divisions deciding whether or not to ordain women as ministers



This vote has never been brought to a GC session. Why not?

Annual Council ACTIONS

portion of the reprimand:

“Decisions to pursue a course of action not in harmony with the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session decisions (with respect to ministerial ordination) represent not only an expression of dissent but also a demonstration of self-determination in a matter previously decided by the collective Church. The General Conference Executive Committee regards these actions as serious mistakes.

The world Church cannot legitimize practices that clearly contradict the intent of General Conference Session actions ... Accordingly, the world Church does not recognize actions authorizing or implementing ministerial ordination without regard to gender.”

Never mind the rebuke by the Annual Council. The Pacific and Columbia Unions went right ahead and continued ordaining women to pastoral ministry. The Pacific Union Recorder stated: “Sev-

eral of the seven local conferences within the PUC have been ordaining women pastors since then, and there are 22 ordained female pastors currently serving in the union (Northern California Conference – 4; Southeastern California Conference – 10; Southern California Conference – 4; La Sierra University – 3; Pacific Union College – 1)”

Sandra Roberts

On October 27, 2013 Sandra Roberts was elected president of the SECC, an action clearly at odds with the will of the world church and its policies. It was now evident that this was the reason all along for the attempt to change policy E-60. Not being able to change E-60, the Pacific Union and NAD officers, who were present, went ahead anyway and approved her election contrary to denominational policy.

A Spectrum blog reported the PUC

president’s role in the election process: “[Ricardo] prefaced the discussion and votes on nominees with news that he had received personal communication from General Conference president Ted Wilson. Graham delivered the cautionary message from Elder Wilson, warning that if a woman were elected president, it would put the conference and the union in direct conflict with the General Conference, and a woman president would not be seated or given a vote at the upcoming Year End Meetings in Silver Spring. At this news, a loud murmur rippled through the gathering.

Graham hastened to add that the nominating committee had followed conference and union by-laws ‘to a T’ (bringing strong applause) and that any potential conflict would only be between the union and the General Conference. He conveyed that voting for a woman as president would not be a problem from a conference

or union standpoint and referenced union action concerning the North American Division’s E-60 policy.”

Elder Graham knows better! He knows very well that the PUC Constitution and Bylaws require the Union to be in harmony with the policies of the NAD and the GC. He knows that the PUC special constituency in 2012 was not able to change the Union’s bylaws that require it to abide by the policies of the NAD and GC. He is very much aware that policy E-60 forbids the election of a woman as conference president. So why would he make statements that are patently inaccurate?

In response to Sandra Roberts’s election, the GC Executive Officers posted the following message: “At the 2012 Annual Council in a voted action entitled, “Statement on Church Polity, Procedures, and Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial Ordination,” the world church strong-



ly indicated that it does not recognize as ordained ministers individuals who do not meet the criteria outlined in policy. It deeply concerns the world leadership of the church that recently a local conference constituency elected as a conference president an individual who is not recognized by the world church as an ordained minister. Ordination to the ministry is one of the criteria set forth for being a conference president. General Conference administration is working with the North American Division administration as they deal with the implications of this local conference action, which is contrary to the 2012 Annual Council action.”

Because her election violated denominational policy, Sandra Roberts was not seated as an *ex-officio* delegate at the Annual Council in 2014 or at the San Antonio GC session in 2015. In a defiant response, the SECC elected Ms. Roberts to be a regular delegate at the session and therefore she was able to vote. In an interview with Chris Oberg, Senior Pastor of the La Sierra University Church in Riverside, California, Ms. Roberts proudly showed her badge indicting



that she was a voting member. What she neglected to say is that she was not there by virtue of her office as president but as a regular delegate.

July 8, 2015: Women's Ordination Denied Once More

On Wednesday, July 8, the GC session for the third time voted against the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. The 2014 Annual Council brought the following motion to the floor:



Question that has been moved:

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

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

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

The delegates voted 'no' to the motion by 59% to 41%.

Some have contended that only divisions were forbidden from approving the ordination of women to pastoral leadership. This might be technically true to the letter, but everyone well knows that the spirit of the vote was to disallow women's ordination in unions and conferences as well. If the world church voted to disallow division executive committees from authorizing such a practice, what would make us think that the world church would be OK with unions authorizing it?

2015: Ted Wilson's Response to the Vote

Unfortunately, there was nothing in the motion at the GC session that addressed the unbiblical practice of ordaining women elders or commissioning women pastors. When Elder Wilson stated after the vote that 'the decision had nothing to do with women being ordained as local elders, a practice based on church policy that has been in place for several decades and that the vote was not related to commissioned ministers, who can be male or female under the church's policy', he was constitutionally correct.

Past decisions at Annual Council had approved the ordination of women elders and commissioned female ministers. As GC president, Elder Wilson was required to abide by the former decisions of the church. He had to play with the hand that he was dealt. Like it or not, Elder Wilson's hands were tied by the previous unbiblical decisions made by the Annual Councils.

The SDA organizational system is not monarchical, where Elder Wilson is the king and the members are his subjects. Within our system of organization (which is after God's order) Elder Wilson could not simply give an executive order to rescind the ordination of women elders and the commissioning of women. If any change is to take place, it must be accomplished by following the proper procedures of a representative system of governance.

It bears noting, however, that Elder Wilson made clear his opposition to the ordination of women elders and pastors at the 13th Business Meeting of the 1995 GC Session on July 5, 1995: *"The request before us from the North American Division is a very potentially divisive proposal. The request could even be more difficult than the actual subject it wishes to address. This request could set in motion widespread factionalism within the worldwide church at a time when we must look for unity in Christ. To allow one or two divisions to deviate from the world church on a major matter could lead to widely varying church doctrine, belief, and practice. Personally I have held for many years that the ordination of women as local church elders and as gospel ministers is a theological issue and that the Scriptures do not support this practice. The subject is not*



about equality. There is no question that men and women are equal. I believe that we are heading into the very last days of this earth's history. I believe with all my heart that Jesus is coming soon. The devil would like nothing better than to divide and conquer this church. We know from biblical prophecy and the Spirit of Prophecy that this will not happen. Christ, the unifying power through the Holy Spirit, will lead this church on to complete victory. I implore and ask every delegate here to consider carefully the difficult consequences of splitting this church. I would respectfully urge every delegate to vote against this request from the North American Division."

Elder Dan Jackson's Response to the Vote

After the vote in San Antonio, Elder Dan Jackson stated that the NAD would abide by the decision of the world church but would continue to ordain women elders and commission women pastors. Some have taken Elder Jackson's remarks as rebellion against the vote of the world church but in all fairness, he is abiding to the very letter with what the church has voted in the past. His remarks are in harmony with previous votes at the Annual Councils in 1975 and 1984 (to authorize the ordination of women elders) and the Annual Council of 1989 (which authorized commissioned women to perform many of the same functions as ordained pastors).

But it must also be stated that his remarks are out of harmony with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Nowhere do we find in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy an authorization to ordain women elders and commission them to perform some of the same func-

tions as ordained pastors.

In spite of the fact that Elder Jackson affirmed that the NAD would abide by the vote of the world church, he has a problem on his hands. What will he do about the female ordinations that have already taken place in his territory in violation of the bylaws of the NAD of the GC (the PUC and the CUC)? And what will he do about Sandra Roberts whose election is clearly in violation of policy E-60? Will he abide by the decision of the world church and suggest that she be removed from office or will he simply ignore the problem?

Another Card in the Deck

And this brings us to our next point. The NAD had another card in its deck. Some Union officers are saying that the vote only prohibited Division Executive Committees from authorizing the ordination of women in their territories. It is claimed that there is no prohibition for Unions to authorize the ordination of women pastors because ordinations are the domain of Unions, not Divisions. This concept is exemplified by a report that was filed on July 10 (two days after the vote) by the *Pacific Union Recorder*. The title of the report read: **"Seventh-day Adventist World Church Votes To Leave Ordination Decision with Unions"**

Of course this misleading title is not what the world church voted at all so the title was later more accurately changed to: **"GC Session Votes No on Division Role in Women's Ordination"**

It is clear that the original title of the report reflected the real belief of the PUC Administration and was perhaps a harbinger of actions to come.

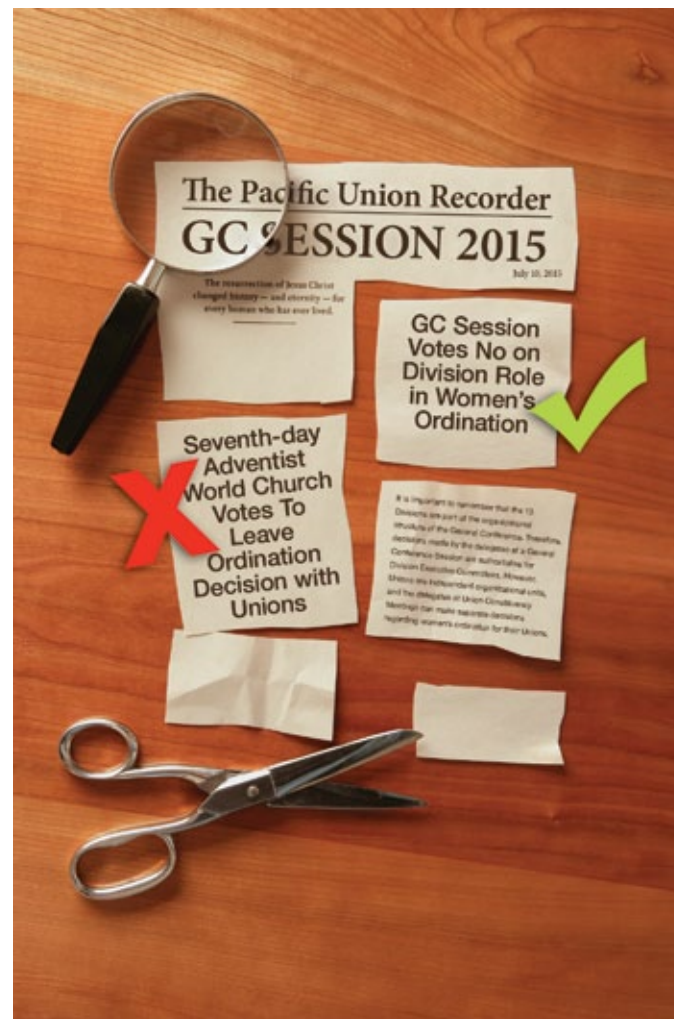
Just a few days later, on July 20, 2015,

Adventist Today published a short article by Sam Millen, an Australian pastor who works in Virginia. The title of the article was: **"It's Time for the Union Conferences to Act!"**

Conference Session are authoritative for Division Executive Committees. However, Unions are independent organizational units, and the delegates at Union Constituency Meetings can make separate decisions regarding women's ordination for their Unions. I am thankful that I work in a Union where God's calling to pastoral ministry is fully recognized without regard to gender. For those of you who are members in Unions where this is not the case, I urge you contact your Union leaders. It's time for the Unions to act!"

So, some Unions claim that the trump card in their deck is that the vote forbade Division Executive Committees from making the decision but not Unions. Pastor Millen and *Adventist Today* seem to be oblivious to the Constitution and Bylaws that govern and link together the various levels of church organization. The simple fact is that Unions cannot

constitutionally act as independent organizational units and make separate decisions that are at odds with the policies of the Divisions of the GC. There are several facts that clearly indicate that this issue of



In part, the article read: *"It is important to remember that the 13 Divisions are part of the organizational structure of the General Conference. Therefore, decisions made by the delegates at a General*

women's ordination is not owned by the Unions but rather by the GC Session.

It was the NAD that twice requested that the matter of women's ordination be placed on the agenda of the GC session. The requests were made at the behest of the unions in the NAD territory. In other words, the Unions through the medium of the NAD took the requests to the Annual Council and through the Annual Council to the world church in GC Session. This fact in itself proves that the Unions realized that the criteria for ordination is beyond their sphere of authority or else they would never have referred it to the delegates of the world church for a vote. Thus the world church owns this issue, not the Unions. The NAD asked that the matter be placed on the GC agenda in 1990 and again in 1995 and when the matter was brought to the floor, the members of the world church said 'no' to the request.

Do Unions Own Ordination?

It is true that in our denominational structure, the union has the authority to approve the ordination of individuals whose names are referred to them by the local Conference Committee. But the Union does not have the authority to establish the **criteria** for those ordinations.

For example, a local Conference Executive Committee can recommend John Doe for ordination to the Union committee, but John Doe must fit the criteria that have been established by the world church in harmony with the Bible. One of those criteria is 'husband of one wife'. If the Union is autonomous from Higher Organizations and chooses to abide by the bylaws of the church only **in general**, would not the union then be free also to employ gay pastors?

Once again, the world church by a study of Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy has established the criteria, and Unions can only approve ordinations that fit the criteria that have been established by the world body. In this sense, Unions operate in a similar fashion to the local Church. Let's pursue this line of thought.

The local church has the authority to accept people into church membership, but it does not have the authority to establish the **criteria** that must be applied for their acceptance. The world church in GC session—so as to keep the global identity of the world intact—has established the criteria and they are the 28 fundamental beliefs as found in the Scriptures. In accepting individuals into membership, the local church must abide by the criteria that have been established by the world church in GC Session. If the church does not, how then can it claim to be part of the body? This is why it is disturbing that in the heat of the debate over women's ordination, the *Pacific Union Recorder* would state: *"The world church adopts common baptism vows and membership policies, but only the local church has **final authority** to decide who will and will not be a member in a particular local church. The Church Manual says that working on the Sabbath is a reason that a member may be disfellowshipped, but only the local church has the authority to decide if a member who is working on Sabbath will actually be disfellowshipped. The decision of the local church cannot be mandated or vetoed by the local conference, union, division or GC."*

The Church Manual that is voted by the world church clearly states that candidates should be living in harmony with our fundamental beliefs in order



to be baptized and it is the world church that votes those beliefs. Can a local Church ignore what The Church Manual requires? If they do, can they really be considered part of the world church? The Church Manual clearly states: "Candidates individually or in a baptismal class should be instructed from the Scriptures regarding the **Church's fundamental beliefs and practices** and the responsibil-

ities of membership. A pastor should satisfy the church by a public examination that candidates are **well instructed**, are committed to taking this important step, and by practice and conduct demonstrate a **willing acceptance of Church doctrines** and the principles of conduct which are the **outward expression of those doctrines**, for "by their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20)."



The question that begs to be answered is this one: If a local Church votes to accept a Sunday keeper into membership, is such a local church really a part of the world body when it has rejected the criterion for membership that was voted by the body?

Let's take another example. Suppose someone who was baptized as an infant by sprinkling wants to join a local Seventh-day Adventist church by profession of faith. Does the local church have autonomy to do so especially when The Church Manual clearly states: "*The Church believes in baptism by immersion and accepts into membership **only** those who have been baptized in this manner.*" The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (2010 Edition), "Membership", p. 45

The question is this: If the local church is required to abide by the decisions of the world church, why not the Unions? The desire of the Unions to act independently of the Constitution and Bylaws of the Division and GC will eventually lead to anarchy.

Let's give another practical example of what could happen if and when a local Church decides to ignore the voice of the world Church. What would a local conference do if a church within its territory decided to start keeping Sunday instead of the Sabbath contrary to Fundamental Belief #20 that was voted by the world church? Would the conference remain with its arms crossed, turn a blind eye and do nothing because the local church is supposedly autonomous in which teachings it will follow and which it will not?

And another question: What would happen if a local church should decide to teach that life on this planet came into existence over millions of years contrary

to the belief of the world body? Would that church have a right to call itself a part of the body? Would the local Conference stand by and allow the church to teach whatever it wished or would the church be disbanded?

It is true that the Conference Officers and Committee have no authority to discipline or disband a local church that does not abide by the teachings and policies of the world church. But the delegates from the entire Conference in a constituency session certainly have the authority to disband such a rebellious Church and sever it from the body. This has been done on repeated occasions! Could not the GC delegates in session do likewise with Unions? The 13 Divisions are not independent entities but rather are parts of the GC as a whole. This is the reason why Divisions are bound by the Master Constitution and Bylaws of the General Conference. Simply put, the Divisions as a whole **are** the GC and therefore the presidents of the Divisions are vice-presidents of the GC and the entire world Church is its constituency.

To a greater or lesser degree, a Church that does its own thing contrary to the will of the body has severed its connection with the body and the same could be said of the Union. If a local Church or Union should decide to launch off on its own, would this not be the encroachments of regionalism and congregationalism?

Bottom line: The local church is **not totally autonomous** from the higher governing bodies of the Church. In order to remain a part of the sisterhood of churches, it must abide by the policies, teachings and votes of the world church! And the same can be said of the Unions.

The various levels of church organi-

zation do not have unbridled liberty to do their own thing. The organizational structure of the SDA Church is neither hierarchical nor congregational. We have a representative style of government where the ultimate decision making power lies in the hands of the membership of the entire world church and not with the leaders or constituencies of any local Church, Conference, or Union.

Thus the present battle over women's ordination is not between a handful of GC leaders at the top and a few rogue upstart Unions at the bottom. It is really a battle between a few rogue Unions and the delegates of the world church gathered in GC session.

Let's take one final example on a policy matter. Suppose that a certain local church decides that it will abide with the GC tithe distribution policy only **in general** and decides to keep fifty percent of the tithe of its members. Would the local Conference and Union simply stand by and say that they have no veto power over that Church's behavior because the local Church has the authority to decide if it will be in harmony with the policies of the world Church? If the Union has the right to follow the policies of the NAD and the GC only **in general**, then why doesn't the local Church have the same right? Isn't what is good for the proverbial goose also good for the proverbial gander?

The fact is that the local Church is as much a part of the local Conference as the local Union is a part of the NAD and the NAD is a division of the GC. So if the Union can do its own thing apart from the Division, why can't the local Church do its own thing independently of the Conference? The desire of Unions to act unilat-

erally on the women's ordination issue opens up, so to speak, a Pandora's box!!

Thankfully some Unions seem to be getting the point. For example, NPUC Executive Committee met on February 20, 2013 to decide how to proceed with the issue of women's ordination in its territory if the vote in San Antonio was 'no'. The official report of the meeting was made public on Gleaneronline.org on February 21 and stated that if the GC Session in San Antonio voted to deny women's ordination, the Executive Committee would call a special constituency session within 120 days to bring the issue to a vote: "*If the world church does not find its way clear at the 2014 Annual Council or 2015 General Conference session to affirm areas within our movement who are open and ready to accept women into the full range of leadership, **the NPUC is prepared to respectfully move ahead to bring the issue to a vote in the Northwest.***"

Thankfully on August 19, 2015 the NPUC Executive Committee backed down and voted to rescind the intention to call a special constituency session within the 60 days.

Will the NAD Comply?

Will the NAD abide by the vote of the world Church? Elder Dan Jackson released a statement shortly after the vote, a statement that was revised later the same day. Here is the original statement: "*Firstly, we want to acknowledge that we will comply with the vote of the world church. Secondly, the vote prohibited the 13 world divisions of the church **or any of their entities** from making their own decisions regarding the consideration and potential implementation of women's*

ordination to the gospel ministry” (NAD president Daniel Jackson, July 10, 2015, emphasis supplied).

The expression ‘or any of their entities’ in the original statement would include all the Conferences and the Unions in the NAD. The revised version makes one wonder whether the Conferences and

same time going its own way in the matter of who will be ordained to the ministry: “*The Pacific Union is committed to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,*” continues Graham. “*It is worth noting, though, that mission and ministry are different. Both are essential. The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist*

The authorization to ordain women elders is owned by the Annual Council (because it was only approved on that level) and therefore the Annual Council could vote to rescind the 1975 and 1984 decisions.

Unions in the NAD will be required to abide by the vote of the world Church. Here is the revised statement: “*Firstly, we want to acknowledge that we will comply with the vote of the world church. Secondly, the vote prohibited the 13 world divisions of the church [the words ‘or any of its entities’ is stricken] from making their own decisions regarding the consideration and potential implementation of women’s ordination to the gospel ministry*” (NAD president Daniel Jackson, July 10, 2015, emphasis supplied).

The deletion of the expression ‘or any of its entities’ strongly hints that the NAD believes that the vote forbade Divisions from ordaining women to pastoral leadership but not Unions.

Ricardo Graham, the president of the Pacific Union seems to concur that the Pacific Union can remain united with the world church on the mission while at the

Church is to preach, teach and live the three angels’ messages, globally. Ministry, on the other hand, is built on the specific gifts given by God to His people in a geographical area. We stand unified with the world church on the mission as articulated in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

In the immediate and foreseeable future I look for the NAD to pressure Unions, Conferences and Churches to ordain a plethora of women elders and to commission and install a multitude of commissioned women pastors in the hopes that there will be so many that there will be no turning back. In fact, the NAD has offered heavy financial subsidies to Conferences that are willing to employ women pastors. The ultimate hope is that there will be so many women elders and commissioned pastors that the world church in GC session will inevita-

bly and finally vote to authorize the ordination of women elders and pastors.

The sun shone in San Antonio on July 8, 2015 but there are storm clouds on the horizon. The South Pacific Division (covering Australia and New Zealand) has laudably agreed to abide by the decision for the time being but affirmed that they will continue to lobby until the world church sees it their way.

“*We hope that, in time, the world Church will recognize gospel equality in regard to women’s ordination. The SPD will work toward that purpose while respecting those with alternative perspectives. The evidence from General Conference Session votes over the last 25 years shows that support for women’s ordination has increased steadily from 24 per cent to 41.3 per cent. We hope and expect that the freedom for the Church to ordain all who God calls to gospel ministry will be reality soon.”*

On the last Business Meeting of the San Antonio GC session, one of the delegates moved that a special committee be established to seriously study the biblical roles of men and women as it relates to ordination. The chair accepted her recommendation. Let us pray that this committee will choose to follow the biblical counsel that all avenues of ministerial service are open to women except the office of elder and ordained minister.

A Simple and Painful Solution

There is a simple and yet painful solution to this entire women’s ordination dilemma. Scrap all the compromises that have been made in the course of 45 years and simply abide by what the Bible teaches. Return to the Biblical model of only men

ordained as elders and pastors.

The authorization to ordain women elders is owned by the Annual Council (because it was only approved on that level) and therefore the Annual Council could vote to rescind the 1975 and 1984 decisions. The world church could also decide to rescind the authorization it rubberstamped in 1990 to allow women to be commissioned to perform pastoral duties without ordination. A church member who favors women’s ordination left a comment on the Adventist Today blog where he clearly laid out the quagmire that the GC leadership now face: “*The facts on the ground are that they can do little to halt the process. They may object, but it is almost certain that they will not make, in the end, any decision that will cut off the resources for the ‘world church’ to operate from the part of the world that provides most of those resources. The principle that governs this is ‘follow the money.’*”

Will the church leadership go back to square one and follow the biblical counsel that only males should be ordained as elders and pastors no matter the consequences? I am not holding my breath! But I am breathing a prayer!

I believe the main reason why this difficult decision has not been made is that the church feels that we are too far down the road and it is too late to turn back. The trauma, division and suffering that such a decision would cause are great. However, it is never too late to right a wrong no matter how much time has passed and how much pain it might cause.

In 1984, the Southern Baptist Convention decided to go back to square one on this issue by making the following reso-





OUR HERMENEUTICS ARE AT RISK

lution: *“Therefore, be it RESOLVED, That we not decide concerns of Christians doctrine and practice by modern **cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends** or by **emotional factors**; that we remind ourselves of the dearly bought Baptist principle of the final authority of Scripture in matters of faith and conduct; and that we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.”*

The question is: Will the Southern Baptists be more loyal to Scripture than the Remnant Church? The Protestant world is watching to see if Seventh-day Adventists will not merely ‘talk the talk’ but rather ‘walk the walk’ and obey a

‘thus saith the Lord’.

A Cyclone is Brewing

A cyclone is brewing beyond the storm. In spite of the fact that in 1986 the Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil unanimously voted the ‘Methods of Bible Study’ document as the official position of the church on how to study the Bible, a delegate from the Northern Asia Pacific Division at the GC Session in San Antonio asked the GC to do a study on the issue of hermeneutics (how to interpret the Bible), probably with a desire to change/revise our time tested method that has been used since the beginning of our history!! According to a Spectrum Blog on July 24, 2015, the

delegate indicated that: *“... the Adventist Church lacked a unified biblical hermeneutic (methodology for interpreting Scripture) and that ‘this more than any other issue divides the Adventist Church. He asked that the church conduct a study of hermeneutics to clarify the denomination’s method of biblical interpretation.”*

After much insistence, the chair accepted the motion and the delegates voted to have the GC look into the matter of hermeneutics in the next quinquennium.

The question is: What would be the purpose of such a study? Would such a study by the church’s scholarly intelligentsia lead to unity of message and mission? Not any more than TOSC led to unity on the issue of women’s ordination! I believe that such a study will lead to further fragmentation of the church and distract it from its unique message and mission. Don’t we long for the days when our ‘uneducated pioneers’ sat around a table with Bible in hand and perhaps a concordance and hammered out our beliefs by taking the Bible as it is written?

What would the conclusions of such a study group be? Would it revise and/or change the official position that the church voted at the 1986 Annual Council in Rio? Would such a decision mean that the SDA Church has been on the wrong track in its hermeneutics for the last 165 years? Would it mean that culture makes it necessary for the church to change its method of interpreting Scripture? In other words, how would the revisions/

changes affect our faith and practice?

Would such a study group tell us that the expression ‘husband of one wife’ is too literalistic and must be reinterpreted to mean ‘spouse of a spouse’ or ‘faithful to one’s spouse’? Would it tell us that 1 Timothy 2:12, 13 applied only to a problem in first century Ephesus? Perhaps such a study could lead us to believe that the biblical injunctions on the use of jewelry were culturally conditioned? Further, might it conclude that we can’t be sure that ‘male and female’ means just that, especially in the light of the fact that

Paul stated that there is neither male nor female? Would it perhaps conclude that certain lifestyle issues such as drinking wine with our meals, drinking coffee and going to the movies are matter of culture rather than Scripture? The jury is still out, but the prospect of a change in our hermeneutics is scary indeed!

Let us pray that God will continue to guide His Remnant Church to make decisions that will keep us the peculiar people that He wants us to be.



PASTOR STEPHEN BOHR



DATING, MATING, & RELATING PART 3

BY PASTOR JUSTIN TOROSSIAN

WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT

It's time! You meet God's relationship readiness criteria!

(See parts 1 & 2 for details.) Your godly mentors also agree—you have God's approval to carefully and prayerfully consider marriage. *And* there just so happens to be a special someone who makes your heart skip a beat every time they smile. What now? Well, if you're hoping for some checklist approach of how to meet and marry the spouse of your dreams, prepare to be disappointed. It doesn't exist! No one-size-fits-all checklist exists. But there *are* certain principles we can apply to almost every case when the time is right.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Thanks to plastic surgery and photo-shop skewing our vision of beauty, it's easy to think that the special someone we consider should be picture perfect. Now don't get me wrong, looks do matter. Physical attraction is neces-

sary ... it's important (Genesis 12:11; 26:7; 29:17). But it's not most important (Proverbs 31:30, 1 Peter 3:4, Ephesians 5:25). The most important thing for a potential life partner to have is a love for Jesus greater than their love for anything or anyone else—including you!

Consider how they spend their time, money and energy ... what they love to talk about. If they spend more time on their hair than in prayer, look out! But if they prioritize time with God and regularly read His word, then be glad. This is solid evidence that they have a real and growing love for Jesus, which is of greatest importance. Physical looks fade with time, but beauty of character increases as we walk with Jesus.

TAKE YOUR TIME

With high-speed internet at LTE speeds, fast-food and microwaveable dinners, “wait” sounds like a four-letter word to most people. But when we bring this mindset into our relationships, we're treading on thin ice. Godly courtship takes time. Don't rush. “The question of marriage should be a study instead of a matter of impulse.”¹ It takes time to really observe someone's character, to see them in different situations in life.

So enjoy getting to know each other. Take time to set a solid foundation of friendship. Don't just hang out one-on-one, spend time together in groups, especially in the beginning. This will enable you to see aspects of their character that you wouldn't have seen any other way. As you grow closer, with the approval of your God-fearing parents, remember that while romance is important, it's not a foundation that will be able to stand the test of time. Friendship grounded in the selfless love of Christ is the foundation upon which the happiest and healthiest of marriages are built. Take time to build this kind of Christ-centered friendship.

WHEN TO MOVE FORWARD

In spite of Disney telling us “follow your heart,” in reality we can't trust our own judgment (see Jeremiah 17:9). The Bible says, “*Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is safety.*”² Surround yourself with as many godly mentors as possible, speaking to and listening to them often—including parents! Take the advice of those who know you well, and God will often speak to you through them. In addition to this, pray twice as much as you normally do.³ Prayer will bring heavenly guidance and clarity.

Once you've established a solid friendship, ask these three important questions. “*Let the questions be raised, Will this union help me heavenward? will it increase my love for God? and will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life? If these reflections present no drawback, then in the fear of God move forward.*”⁴ If your godly mentors agree that these three questions present no drawback, and the timing is right, “*then in the fear of God, move forward.*”

THE DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

The purpose of dating/courtship is to determine whether or not two people are right for marriage. This means that our definition of success can't be based upon whether or not the relationship results in the couple exchanging the words, “I do.” If the purpose of courtship is to discover God's will for you, and you discover that it's not His will that you be married to that person, your courtship was a success! On the contrary, while a successful courtship may result in a breakup, there are often



Take time to build this kind of Christ-centered friendship.

unsuccessful courtships that end in marriage. These marriages and much misery would never have existed, had such couples paid attention to the red flags that were flying high during their courtship!

Ultimately, with commitment comes risk, and that can be scary. But as you depend on the Lord and determine to follow His guidelines in your relationship, He will grant you success! Whether that means going your separate ways or being united for time and eternity, trust that God's ways are always best.

TRUSTING GOD TO LEAD

Aren't you glad that God promises us His direction? You can rest assured today that with your life in His hands, He won't let you make a mistake. Listen to this:

"Your ears shall hear a word behind

*you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."*⁵

*"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you."*⁶

If you desire to know His will, God will make it known to you. *"Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue. And they will receive not only wisdom, but strength."*⁷

What a promise ... what a God! He guarantees that He'll guide us in every step of our lives, and especially in choosing a husband or wife. Our success is assured with the Lord on our side. In closing, won't you join me in praying this prayer?

♥ *"Father, I know You want me to be happy. I know I don't have the wisdom needed ... but I trust You to guide me as You've promised. I place my life in Your hands. At every crossroad I face, give me ears to hear and a heart to follow Your instruction through Your word and through my mentors. Thank You for the promise of success in this, and every area of my life as I surrender it to You. In Jesus' name, Amen."*



PASTOR
JUSTIN
TOROSSIAN

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- *Letters to Young Lovers & Adventist Home*, books by Ellen White
- *The Elephant in the Room: Sex, the Gospel, and the Church*, by Dustin Hall
- *A Greater Lust*, series on Victory Over Pornography and Lust by Scott Ritsema, beltofruthministries.org
- *CROSS — Christian Resources on Spouse Selection*, mybiblefirst.org
- *Happily Ever After: Finding True Love God's Way*, audio sermon series by Alan & Nicole Parker, audioverse.org
- *Keys for a Happy Marriage* free Bible study, amazingfacts.org
- *They Lived Happily Ever After* DVD series by Pastor Stephen Bohr

- 1 *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 29
- 2 Proverbs 11:14
- 3 *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 39
- 4 *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 23
- 5 Isaiah 30:21 NKJV
- 6 Psalm 32:8
- 7 *Desire of Ages*, p. 668



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Testimony

TIME

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Wonderful Truths

“We found the truth through watching Pastor Stephen Bohr’s sermons i.e., *Cracking The Genesis Code* and *His Way Is In The Sanctuary*. As a result of these wonderful truths, we located a SDA church in our area and were both baptized on June 21, 2014. We continue to grow spiritually by watching Pastor Bohr’s lectures every day. God has truly raised up a wonderful teacher and preacher in Pastor Bohr. We have learned so much from him, and look forward to the day where we can thank him personally for leading us to Jesus.

If the opportunity does not present itself here on earth, we will definitely find him in heaven. Please extend our gratitude to him and the entire team at *Secrets Unsealed* for the glorious, life-giving work they are doing, and we pray that God will continue to abundantly bless the *Secrets Unsealed* ministry. We are so touched by all the good work being carried out by *Secrets Unsealed* that we make regular donations to this good course, and have been doing so for the past several years.”

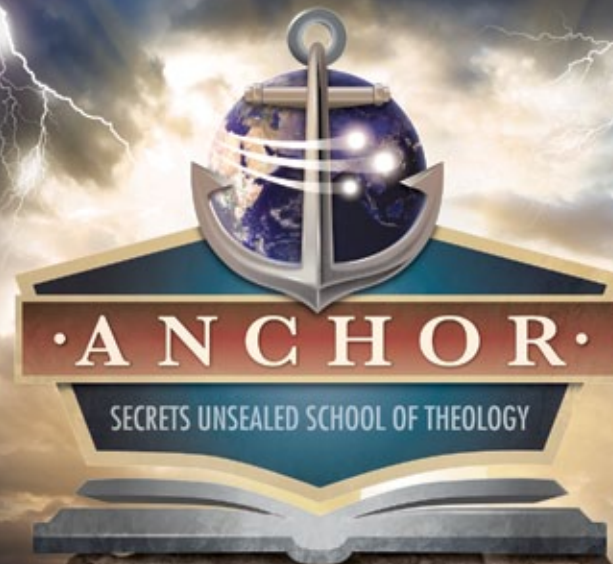
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“We are always humbled when we receive donations in the mail, and recently *Secrets Unsealed* received a donation from a prisoner in the amount of \$4.50. The note specified that his gift was for the production truck. We are praising the Lord for Jeremy’s sacrifice!”

JEREMY, PRISON



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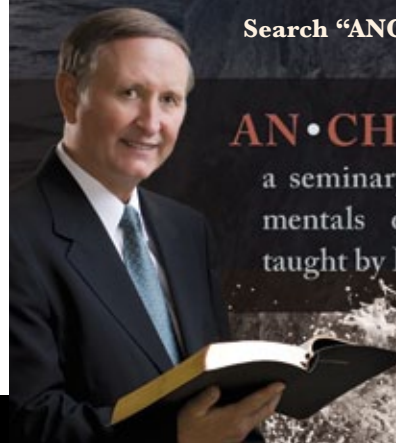
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