

1 PRE/PREXAD/GCDO12AC/12AC to TNCW

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3 132-12G STATEMENT ON CHURCH POLITY, PROCEDURES,  
4 AND RESOLUTION OF DISAGREEMENTS IN THE  
5 LIGHT OF RECENT UNION ACTIONS ON  
6 MINISTERIAL ORDINATION

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8 VOTED, 1. To adopt the following Statement on Church Polity, Procedures, and  
9 Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial  
10 Ordination and

11  
12 2. To request that division administrations engage with field unit  
13 administrators in reviewing this statement and its implications for Church structure,  
14 identity, operations, and mission:

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19  
20 Foundational principles for Seventh-day Adventist Church structure and  
21 operations are rooted in the Bible and draw heavily from the teachings of Jesus, the  
22 apostles and the experience of the early Church. In the New Testament the people of God  
23 are urged to demonstrate unity (John 15 and 17, Ephesians 4); to engage in worldwide  
24 mission (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:7-8, Acts 10-11); to acknowledge  
25 differences/disagreements and to have a process for their resolution (Acts 6, 15,  
26 Galatians 3:26-29, Philippians 2); and to live as a transformed and transforming  
27 community in a fractured and sin-burdened world (Ephesians 2-4).

28  
29 The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to preserve its identity as a united global  
30 family while addressing mission opportunities and challenges in widely differing cultural,  
31 political and economic environments. The desire to hold two objectives, global unity<sup>1</sup>,  
32 and global mission, in creative and dynamic balance has led to an organizational structure  
33 that shares and delegates responsibility for mission within a framework of participation in  
34 and respect for collective decision-making processes. Within this organizational  
35 structure, decisions of a General Conference Session represent the highest authority<sup>2</sup>—  
36 the voice of the whole Church in respect to beliefs, procedures and relationships.

37  
38 It is natural to expect that in response to diverse and ever-changing circumstances  
39 differences will arise in determining the most appropriate ways of accomplishing mission  
40 while also preserving Church structure and relationships. The articulation of different  
41 viewpoints and the expression of disagreement are important ways by which the Church  
42 gains new insights and more fully understands the global impact of decisions. Speaking  
43 and listening, when done respectfully, are essential to the operational health of the whole  
44 body and its continuing effectiveness in mission. The process adopted by the Church for  
45 the resolution of disagreements involves forums where all those affected by a decision  
46 are represented in the exploration and adoption of decisions.

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2 The call, by both individuals and organizations, for change in ministerial  
3 ordination practices illustrates one expression of disagreement. This subject has been on  
4 the global agenda of the Church at General Conference Sessions for several decades.  
5 Thus far the General Conference Session (by actions in 1990<sup>3</sup> and 1995<sup>4</sup>) has chosen the  
6 pathway of uniform practice worldwide—ministerial ordination for males only. A  
7 recurring question is whether or not the authority to grant ministerial ordination without  
8 regard to gender could be granted to divisions without making the provision mandatory  
9 everywhere. Several unions in various parts of the world have voiced support for this  
10 kind of change in ministerial ordination practices. Three union constituency sessions have  
11 authorized their executive committees to approve ministerial ordination without regard to  
12 gender. Of these, two have recently chosen to proceed according to the constituency  
13 decision.

14  
15 Decisions to pursue a course of action not in harmony with the 1990 and 1995  
16 General Conference Session decisions (with respect to ministerial ordination) represent  
17 not only an expression of dissent but also a demonstration of self-determination in a  
18 matter previously decided by the collective Church. The General Conference Executive  
19 Committee regards these actions as serious mistakes. They directly challenge two world  
20 Church decisions on the matter of ordination. They create doubts about the importance of  
21 collective decision-making as a basic feature of denominational life. They weaken the  
22 fabric of Church life and operations by giving opportunity for other entities to follow this  
23 example in order to justify independence and autonomy in other matters rather than  
24 maintaining a mutual commitment to collective decision-making.

25  
26 The world Church cannot legitimize practices that clearly contradict the intent of  
27 General Conference Session actions. This applies to ordination decisions as well as to  
28 other matters in which a local organization may feel constrained not just to voice its  
29 disagreement with the world Church but to proceed along a pathway that directly  
30 conflicts with the expressed will of the worldwide Church. Accordingly, the world  
31 Church does not recognize actions authorizing or implementing ministerial ordination  
32 without regard to gender.

33  
34 This statement deals with Church structure and procedures. It does not address the  
35 question of ministerial ordination practices per se. The central issue is one of Church  
36 polity—how the Church defines its organization, governance and operations. Historically,  
37 the Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed on the principle of interdependence  
38 rather than independence. A course of action contrary to the will of the whole places the  
39 organization at risk.

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1 Discussion and debate about ministerial ordination practice is a separate matter  
2 and is under global study and review. General Conference Session decisions (1990 and  
3 1995) did not authorize ministerial ordination without regard to gender, either globally or  
4 regionally. Any change in this practice requires action by a General Conference Session.  
5 Every Church organization in the world has been given the opportunity of participating in  
6 the current global study. This can be accomplished through interaction with the  
7 respective division-appointed Biblical Research Committee. Division Biblical Research  
8 Committees will interface with the General Conference-appointed Theology of  
9 Ordination Study Committee. The study is to be completed by 2014 with a report from  
10 the Theology of Ordination Study Committee presented to the General Conference  
11 Executive Committee at its 2014 Annual Council, which will decide what to refer to the  
12 General Conference Session in 2015.

13  
14 The role of women in ministry and leadership has been a long-standing question.  
15 It is one that attracts strong yet differing convictions and can readily divide families,  
16 congregations and constituencies. The process toward finding acceptable solutions must  
17 not obscure the contribution that women have made and continue to make in many areas  
18 of Church life and leadership.

19  
20 The General Conference Executive Committee specifically affirms the important  
21 roles that women fill in the life of the Church. Their giftedness and commitment is a  
22 blessing to the whole Church and a necessary part of its work in mission.

23  
24 Moments of tension in denominational life can be opportunities for both learning  
25 and enhancing relationships. The presence of conflict and the expression of difference  
26 can help make the Church stronger. In such moments the commitment of all to informed  
27 and collective decision-making processes is the best way to resolve matters while keeping  
28 the Church together as a world family.

29  
30 The General Conference Executive Committee appeals to all organizations—local  
31 churches, local conferences/missions, unions, institutions and divisions—to consider  
32 thoughtfully the impact and implications of decisions beyond the boundaries of each  
33 entity's territory of operations. General Conference *Working Policy*, the *Church Manual*,  
34 and General Conference Session decisions are designed to assist the Church in  
35 demonstrating the unity for which Jesus prayed and at the same time to provide a  
36 structure that advances the gospel commission in every part of the world.

37  
38 This appeal is also addressed to individual Church members everywhere. Drawing  
39 upon Paul's analogy of the Church as a body (1 Corinthians 12) it is a call for all parts of  
40 the body to perform their individual service, to express their unique giftedness with the

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1 realization that each is part of something much larger—a worldwide family that seeks to  
2 do all things in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17).

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6 <sup>1</sup> In the New Testament Church, unity does not always require uniformity (Acts 15). Instead, unity is based  
7 upon mutual commitment to Jesus Christ, to His Word, to His mission, and to the community of believers.  
8 One of the ways by which unity is demonstrated is seen in the process of making decisions that affect the  
9 whole community—a process of deciding together. The resulting decisions may recognize the legitimacy of  
10 practices that do not always reflect uniformity (John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26-27; Romans 12:4-5; 1  
11 Corinthians 12:12-14; Ephesians 2:19-22; Ephesians 4:1-6, 14-16; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel*  
12 *Workers* pages 24-31).

13  
14 <sup>2</sup> A General Conference Session is affirmed as the highest authority in the Church in the following ways:

15  
16 a. **From the writings of Ellen G White:** “I have often been instructed by the Lord that no  
17 man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other man. Never should the mind of one  
18 man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to  
19 say what plans shall be followed. But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren  
20 assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be  
21 stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent  
22 maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body.

23 At times, when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in  
24 the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God’s work, I have  
25 said that I can no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the  
26 voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of  
27 duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected. God has ordained  
28 that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference,  
29 shall have authority. The error that some are in danger of committing is in giving to the mind and judgment  
30 of one man, or a small group of men, the full measure of authority and influence that God has vested in His  
31 church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and  
32 advancement of His work.”—9T 260

33 b. **From the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (18<sup>th</sup> Edition)*:** “In the Church today  
34 the General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, is  
35 the highest ecclesiastical authority in the administration of the Church.”—p. 31

36 c. **From *General Conference Working Policy B 10 22*:** “All organizations and institutions  
37 throughout the world will recognize the authority of the General Conference Session as the highest  
38 authority of the Seventh-day Adventist Church under God.”

39  
40 <sup>3</sup> **Fifty-Fifth General Conference Session, July 11, 1990**—Excerpts from Session Bulletin #7, p. 15,  
41 dealing with the action and report of the Role of Women Commission: “Voted, To accept the following  
42 report and recommendations of the Role of Women Commission as recommended by the 1989 Annual  
43 Council: ... The commission having listened to the arguments and presentations for and against the  
44 ordination of women; having sensed the needs and concerns of the world field; having carefully considered  
45 what is probably best and the least disruptive for the world church at this time; and recognizing the  
46 importance of our eschatological mission, the witness and image of our spiritual family, and the need for  
47 oneness of and unity in the church, reports to the 1990 General Conference session upon the  
48 recommendation of the 1989 Annual Council the following results of its deliberation: 1. While the

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1 commission does not have a consensus as to whether or not the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G  
2 White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, concludes unanimously  
3 that these sources affirm a significant, wide-ranging, and continuing ministry for women, which is being  
4 expressed and will be evidenced in the varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy  
5 Spirit. 2. Further, in view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel  
6 ministry in the world church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the  
7 mission of the church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry.” (The vote was  
8 1,173 in favor, 377 opposed.)  
9

10 <sup>4</sup> **Fifty-Sixth General Conference Session, July 5, 1995**—Excerpts from Session Bulletin #8, p. 30:  
11 [Discussion was held on a General Conference Executive Committee action] “To refer to the 1995 General  
12 Conference Session the North American Division request that the General Conference in Session adopt  
13 provisions on ordination as outlined below: ‘The General Conference vests in each division the right to  
14 authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition,  
15 where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified  
16 individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committee takes specific  
17 actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in  
18 those divisions.’ ...In favor of the recommendation: 673. In opposition to the recommendation: 1,481. Total  
19 number of votes: 2,154. By this vote, the request of the North American Division was denied.”