

OFFICIAL STATEMENT
For Immediate Release
May 17, 2012

Columbia Union Executive Committee Calls Special Constituency Meeting to Authorize Ordinations Without Regard to Gender

At its May 17 meeting, the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee received a report from an ad hoc committee assigned to study how to affirm women in ministry.

After discussing the report (included below), the committee voted:

- 1 To recognize its responsibility to act morally and ethically by expressing unyielding commitment to ordain qualified persons to the gospel ministry without regard to gender, and
- 1 To call a special constituency meeting for the purpose of authorizing ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender, and
- 1 To set the meeting date for July 29, 2012, at 10 a.m., at a location to be determined in Maryland.

The committee approved the motion by a vote of 34-6, with one abstention.

"I believe this action represents our committee's desire to move the mission forward, and we are calling this special session to facilitate a wider conversation," said Dave Weigley, union president, explaining the need for input from the larger constituency.

To help members understand the committee's perspective, leaders will publish a special July issue of the union paper, the *Visitor*. It will provide an in-depth review of biblical, historical and Spirit of Prophecy guidelines concerning the role of women in ministry.

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Report of the Columbia Union Ad Hoc Committee Affirming Women in Ministry

Women in Seventh-day Adventist ministry are being affirmed through appreciation, recognition and representation at many levels in the church. This needs to be continued and increased. The most significant confirmation,

however, requires the action of the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee.

The affirmation of women in ministry in the Adventist church has both a moral and ethical imperative based on Scripture, church history and our diversity in unity.

SCRIPTURE: As a global church that values the authority of Scripture, we acknowledge that:

- A Scripture is clear that the end-time church is blessed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers (Joel 2:28-29 and Acts 2:17-18), with the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) and through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, both women and men preach God's message (Fundamental Beliefs 14 and 17).
- B We are commanded to practice justice in our actions and relationships (Micah 6:8).
- C Everything contained in the Bible relates to the concepts represented in three words: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. This continuum provides the natural outline to the biblical story. In Eden, God created male and female as equals, both spiritually and relationally, and both are necessary to fully reflect the image of God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).
- D Multiple times throughout Scripture God chose women to lead His people (Deborah, Esther, Hulda, Anna, four daughters of Philip, Phoebe, Junia etc.).

HISTORY: As a global church that values God's leading in its history we acknowledge the following significant hallmarks:

- A The Seventh-day Adventist Church was co-founded by a woman, Ellen G. White, who remains an authoritative and guiding voice.
- B At the General Conference Session on December 5, 1881, a motion was made: "RESOLVED, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry." Reported in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881. It appears there was no record of any action taken.
- C Ellen White wrote in the July 9, 1895, *Review & Herald*, of a ministry that women, who gave themselves to it, should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.
- D Willie White ordained deaconesses on January 6, 1900, in Australia. In 1975 an action was taken to ordain deaconesses at GC Session. In 1985 the action was reaffirmed and in 2010 it was recorded in the *Church Manual*. Ordination of women elders was approved in 1975 and reaffirmed at Annual Council in 1984.
- E The General Conference voted to authorize women to serve as pastors (1990).
- F Sixteen female pastors have already been ordained in China. These women are playing a significant role in the rapid church growth in their country and

the Northern Asia Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists recognizes their ordinations.

DIVERSITY IN UNITY: As a global church that values diversity in unity:

- A We affirm that diversity in unity is part of the divine order for creation, redemption, restoration and for the church (Ephesians 4, John 17, 1 Corinthians 12:12).
- B We affirm God's leading in utilizing the talents of women for the mission of the church. "When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will feel the loss if the talents of both are not combined" (*Evangelism*, p. 469).
- C We understand that "there must be room to recognize the need for a legitimacy of local adaptation of policies and procedures that facilitate mission while not diminishing the worldwide identity, harmony and unity of the Church" (GC Spring Council 2012 116-12G Report).
- D We celebrate our diversity of culture, gender and ethnicity.
- E We recognize that "The distribution of authority and responsibility in the church, along with the recognition that 'authority rests in membership,' presents significant challenges in finding a balance between centralized authority (actions of the global church) and the more localized authority (actions of the constituency) in churches, conferences and unions.
- F "At the same time, the church has worked to preserve unity, the effect of church growth has enlarged the understanding of diversity and its rightful place in a worldwide community. To expect that every entity in the world church will look and function exactly like every other entity of its type may in itself become an impediment to mission. The development of structural designs in the history of the church indicates that unity must be built on a stronger foundation than uniformity" (GC Spring Council 2012 116-12G Report).
- G We acknowledge that "different elements of organizational authority are distributed among the various levels of denominational organization ... decisions regarding the ordination of ministers are entrusted to the union conference/mission ..." (NAD Working Policy B 05, 6).
- H We recognize that ordination is for the world church (NAD Working Policy L 40 and L 45 05). We further recognize that ordained ministers may not function outside the territory of the organization issuing their credential, unless invited to do so.

Note: All scriptural references are from the New King James Version (NKJV).