

Statement of the North German Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

On the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Ministry

I. Preface

In April of 2012, the constituency meeting of the North German Union Conference (NGU) voted to ordain women as pastors to the worldwide ministry. This resolution was preceded by an intense and spiritual discussion; it was a clear signal in favor of anchoring the equality of men and women in the policies of the church and also implementing it in the practice of ordination. The resolution of the NGU constituency meeting is in formal contradiction to the worldwide policy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (General Conference Working Policy).

In July of 2015, the General Conference Session voted against the motion to allow each Division of the church to decide for itself whether to ordain women. Numerous statements were issued around the world in reaction to this decision, ranging from expressions of relieved affirmation to massive disappointment over the result. Among them were church members, pastors, teachers (e.g. from Friedensau Adventist University) as well as elected leaders from the Unions and Divisions of the worldwide church.

The two German Union Conferences feel that these reactions reaffirm their statement from July 2015, which includes the following:

In our view, a positive answer [by the General Conference Session] would have been appropriate and overdue, and would have been in better keeping with the courageous (pioneer) spirit of the Advent Movement. At the same time, **we respect the will of the majority** of the General Conference Session. However, we decisively oppose every form of discrimination against women. We believe that both men and women are equipped with the same gifts that are needed for service in the ministry as pastors. We will therefore **make use of all available possibilities** for engaging women as fully authorized pastors in our churches.

II. Policy Decision

Encouraged by the numerous expressions of solidarity, and building on the statement cited above, the North German Union Conference (NGU) resolves the following for its territory:

1. The NGU is committed to the biblical practice of the laying on of hands with a prayer of blessing as visible sign of the church in order to commission its pastors for service in full-time ministry in the churches. This is what the NGU means when it speaks of "ordination."
2. This commissioning or "ordination" is granted to both men and women without distinction and is valid only in the territory of the North and South German Union Conferences, because our administrative bodies only have the authority to speak for these regions.

3. The election of a pastor, male or female, to serve in the leadership position of (Conference or Union) President will be implemented by a renewed commissioning or "ordination."
4. This renewed commissioning or "ordination" for service in the leadership of our church takes place with the understanding that this does not establish any kind of hierarchy, but is rather done in recognition of the particular responsibility of leadership, asking for God's special blessing for this task.
5. With this understanding of the practice of the laying on of hands, male and female pastors in the territory of the North and South German Union Conferences will be commissioned or "ordained" for their ministry.
6. In this way, both Union Conferences adhere to their statement issued in July of 2015 and implement the equal treatment of male and female pastors in concrete practice. In addition, the intended goal of the resolution passed by the North German Union Conference constituency meeting in 2012, namely to commission or ordain men and women in the same manner, is also implemented. Moreover, the resolution is in agreement with the guidelines of the General Conference (Working Policy E 5 10).

III. Rationale

1. Men and women are created equal; the likeness of God is reflected in both (Gen. 1 and 2).
2. The corresponding New Testament position is formulated by Paul in Galatians 3:28: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (NKJV). Men and women are equal in Christ.
3. The likeness of God that men and women reflect is the result of a free and sovereign creative act by God. Through his Holy Spirit, God continues to act with the same sovereignty even today, and equips men and women with gifts *"as He wills"* (1 Cor. 12:11; John 3:7-8).
4. All three biblical statements cited above are expressions of fundamental theological categories, because they describe what is characteristic of the nature of God and of humanity, and testify to the freedom with which God continues to deal with human beings today.
5. The priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5) establishes no hierarchy or doctrine of clerical offices through a special ceremony of ordination. It is rather a call for all followers of Jesus to engage in the ministry of preaching reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). The members of this priesthood receive their "ordination to the priesthood" in baptism. Martin Luther called this the "priestly birth"
6. Following Genesis 1 and 2 and Galatians 3:28, the equality of men and women is explicitly expressed in Fundamental Belief #14 of our church (Unity in the Body of Christ): *"In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another."*

7. Following John 3 and 1 Corinthians 12, Fundamental Belief #17 underlines our understanding of the bestowing of spiritual gifts and their use in ministry: *"God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts ... Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions."*
8. Fundamental Beliefs #6, 7 and 21 confirm that both men and women are called to exercise "dominion," that is, to act as responsible stewards of God's creation. Beyond that, equality concerning the exercise of these responsibilities is an essential aspect of human nature as created by God.
9. Biblical statements need to be considered in their cultural context. For example, texts like 1 Tim. 2:12 (*"I do not permit a woman to teach..."*) or 1 Peter 3:1ff. must be read against the background of a view of women that placed them in a subordinate role. These passages are to be understood in light of the statements in Genesis 1-2 and Galatians 3:28. The power of these statements can even change cultures.
10. The equality of men and women is a question of values and of ethics. "Justice" is a fundamental biblical category that is at the center of the message taught by the Old Testament prophets as well as by Jesus and the apostles. If women and men are equally equipped by God himself for ministry as pastors, and are called and appointed as such by the church, then the church cannot fall back behind what God himself has done in his authority and power. It is much rather called to implement the fundamental value of justice by treating men and women equally, and thus living out this value in practice. Thus, biblical insights become tangible in daily life, which alone lends them credibility.

Executive Committee of North German Union Conference

Muehlenrahmede, 2016-06-19