

Doesn't the Bible teach that women are not to have authority over men? And wouldn't that mean the Adventist Church shouldn't ordain them?

Rather than granting authority over others, ordination involves the recognition of spiritual gifts and it positions the recipient as a servant-leader of others.

In most cases where there is disagreement about whether women should be ordained as pastors and elders, the issue of headship is the point of contention. Some of the most learned theologians disagree on what the Bible says about headship, and some insist that Scripture does not address headship at all.

What is clear is that the Adventist Church has never uniformly or officially applied the "headship scriptures" to exclude women from leadership and teaching positions.

Since the beginning of the Adventist Church, women have held administrative and leadership positions in the organization. In a letter written in 1879, Ellen White says: "It is not always men who are best adapted to the successful management of a church. If faithful women have more deep piety and true devotion than men, they could indeed by their prayers and their labors do more than men who are unconsecrated in heart and life." (*Manuscript Releases 19:56*)

Isn't the unity of the Adventist Church jeopardized if only some parts of the world ordain women?

Suitability is an important consideration in appointing a minister to a position. There are ordained ministers in our Church today who would not be effective everywhere in the world because of language and culture. Acceptance of diversity in the various divisions brings unity, not disunity.

In recent decades, the General Conference has appointed women to leadership roles, such as the ordination of deaconesses and elders and the commissioning of female pastors. Although these policies are not practiced in all regions of the world—nor even in all churches in a given conference or union—the Seventh-day Adventist Church has remained a single, worldwide organization. The unity of our church organization is anchored in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs.

If God meant for women to be church leaders, wouldn't Jesus have included women as disciples?

Jesus' inner circle of disciples was not only exclusively male, it also included no slave, freed slave, Gentile, or person of color. His choice was likely respectful of the culture of the day. Women are mentioned as having followed Jesus, but traveling with Him could have stirred suspicion and disapproval, and been undermining to His ministry.

Did Ellen White and the other Adventist Church founders support female pastors and the ordination of women?

The White Estate has concluded that Ellen White did not take a formal stand on the issue. However, many of her statements in the *Review and Herald* indicate support of female pastors and their ordination:

Jan. 15, 1901: "It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God."

July 9, 1895: "Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands."

Jan. 2, 1879: "The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth."

Doesn't the fact that all Old Testament priests were male demonstrate that women were not intended for leadership?

While Old Testament priests were exclusively male, they were also chosen from only one tribe, the Levites. The Levitical system included many ordinances not practiced today, such as sacrificing lambs. The Old Testament priesthood is not the model for New Testament Christian ministry.



## THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST® CHURCH  
North American Division

### What is the purpose of ordination?

Ordination formally sanctions an individual for the purpose of fulfilling the Church's global mission (Matthew 24:14; 28:19–20). The worldwide body accepts in good faith what has been locally ratified (e.g., Paul's introductory letter exhorting congregations to cordially receive Timothy, who had been properly trained and commissioned). Ordination grants special sanction, but it does not imbue the individual with added or spiritual insight. It does not elevate the recipient above the laity nor grant any special dispensation of grace.

### Doesn't the Bible oppose the ordination of women?

While the Bible does not use the specific term *ordination*, it does not restrict by gender the acts of prayer, anointing, and the laying on of hands for the purpose of consecrating an individual for service.

### If the Bible does not directly mandate the ordination of women, wouldn't it be best to not ordain them?

When specific topics are not addressed in Scripture, it is considered a sound, acceptable practice to apply principles drawn from the Bible. James and Ellen White followed this practice according to an example James cited in the *Review and Herald* (April 26, 1860):

But if it be asked, Where are your plain texts of scripture for holding church property legally? we reply, The Bible does not furnish any; neither does it say that we should have a weekly paper, a steam printing-press, that we should publish books, build places of worship, and send out tents? Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before men," etc.: but he does not give all the particulars how this shall be done. The church is left to move forward in the great work, praying for divine guidance, acting upon the most efficient plans for its accomplishment. We believe it safe to be governed by the following RULE: All means which, according to sound judgment, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations, should be employed.

The **NAD Theology of Ordination Study Committee** was commissioned to research ordination and its practical implications for the Adventist Church. The full report, which affirms the conferring of ordination on men and women, is available online at [www.nadordination.com](http://www.nadordination.com).

### Doesn't the Bible teach that women are not to speak in church?

Guidelines for interpreting Scripture (published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the "Methods of Bible Study" document, online at [adventist.org](http://adventist.org)) encourage the consideration of cultural context for interpreting texts.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34 (KJV), Paul writes, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." The Adventist Church interprets Paul's statement as having cultural application to local circumstances, not as limiting the ministry of women in the Church.

### Shouldn't the Bible always be taken literally?

Approaches to biblical interpretation range from assuming that Scripture is not at all inspired to assuming that every word was "dictated" by God. The approach to biblical interpretation officially adopted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church acknowledges thought inspiration, not literal word-for-word interpretation. (See the "Methods of Bible Study" document, online at [adventist.org](http://adventist.org).)

In the introduction to *The Great Controversy* (p. v), Ellen White explains that the truths of God are written in the language of humans:

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all "given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

### If we interpret the Bible as supporting the ordination of women, doesn't that open the way for allowing most anything?

Some have reasoned that by allowing the ordination of women when there is not a specific biblical command to do so, the Adventist Church is disregarding scriptural authority. This line of reasoning results in fear that the Church is opening the way for embracing practices that the Bible does not condone.

The Adventist Church regards the Bible as the authoritative, infallible revelation of God's will. When Scripture does not offer a clear, indisputable directive on a subject, we look to similar or related scriptural examples for guidance. (See the "Methods of Bible Study" document, online at [adventist.org](http://adventist.org).) Since the ordination of women is neither plainly mandated nor forbidden in Scripture, this is a case in which we must draw on biblical principles for direction.

We have sought the Spirit of truth, and we have weighed the evidence throughout Scripture. Our overwhelming conclusion is that the biblical principles of unity, equality, and justice call for the formal sanctioning of women to consecrated service.

By following the Bible and its principles, our Church is safeguarded against "allowing most anything."

### Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church under pressure to ordain women because of the feminist movement?

The question of the role of women in the Church is not just a recent issue; it has been debated for decades. The ordination of women was first formally proposed in the Adventist Church back in 1881 when a resolution was presented at the General Conference Session. (That resolution was forwarded to the General Conference Executive Committee, and no apparent action was taken.) Our founders supported female leaders and preachers, as the role of Ellen White confirms.