

Yes, it has happened —

The First Conference and Union Approved Women's Ordination Service

When sincere believers plead for a return to our historic beliefs and standards, they are told they are troublemakers and should be quiet. But when it comes to appeasing the liberals, wonders never cease in our denomination.

Six or seven women (not certain as we go to press) have now been ordained to the Adventist ministry in four services.

Throughout these repeated flauntings of church authority, again and again, church leaders have said these acts of rebellion were harmless affairs—since, in no instance, has a local or union conference given official approval to the action.

Well, that has now changed! Read this:

THE CANDIDATE

Esther Fern Ramharacksingh Knott is probably of Indian (India) descent. Born in Trinidad, she lived in England and Canada before attending Andrews University. Graduating in 1980 with a baccalaureate in Religion, she accepted a call to Broadview Academy (Illinois), where she served as a campus chaplain for three years. Returning to Andrews, she accepted a position as assistant chaplain while she completed a master's degree in religious education (1983-1987).

She spent the next three years in the North American Division office as director of their Adventist Heritage Project. As 1990 opened, she accepted a position as associate pastor at Sligo Church. In June, she married Ronald Knott, public relations director at Andrews, who had transferred to a position of special projects officer at the General Conference. In May 1994, their first child was born.

While on the staff at Sligo, she is reported to have focused her attentions on personal evangelism, nurture, worship services, and women's ministries.

She is today an ordained woman minister in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Her ordination received the fullest written, vocal, and

public approval by the president, office staff, and committees of the Potomac Conference and Columbia Union.

All this may seem incredible, but read on.

THE POTOMAC CONFERENCE COMMITTEE VOTE

The Potomac Conference includes Virginia, the entire Washington, D.C., area, and the most heavily populated suburban communities surrounding the District, both in Virginia and Maryland. Thus this conference is something of a bellwether church entity; for it includes the offices of the General Conference, North American Division, and their subsidiary agencies. It also includes the churches which the staff of those offices work.

In May 1996, the Potomac Conference Committee met in a duly called meeting—and voted its approval of the forthcoming ordination of a woman to the ministry!

This is incredible since, prior to that vote, after that vote, and even after the ordination which climaxed it—North American and General Conference leaders continued to maintain that it was all right for local churches to act defiantly in this matter, since no conferences nor union committees had approved such an action!

I would not believe this myself, except that I have the data in print.

At that May meeting, the Potomac Conference Committee voted to recommend Esther Knott for ordination to the ministry "as soon as the world church will allow it."

THE COLUMBIA UNION CONFERENCE COMMITTEE VOTE

Shortly afterward, in the same month, the Columbia Union Conference Committee met in solemn session—and added its approval to this ordination. It was worded in this way:

Esther Knott "has fulfilled all the requirements for Ordination, and is authorized to receive an Or-

History of Adventist Women's Ordinations 1995 down to the Present

The women whom our churches have ordained, have probably been fine individuals. The problem is that the ordaining of women as pastors over adult congregations is not in conformity with Biblical standards. Here is a brief historical overview of developments to the present time (August 1996):

On Wednesday, July 5, 1995 at the 1995 General Conference Session held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, the delegates were asked by North American Division leaders to approve a plan whereby each division could decide for itself as to whether or not it would ordain women to the ministry.

The delegates, gathered from around the world, soundly rejected the NAD proposal by a vote of 1,481 to 673.

Prior to the Session, it had been privately discussed by a number of liberal leaders in America that, if Utrecht voted down the recommendation, it would be useless to present it a third time to a Session.

The 69 percent vote at Utrecht, rejecting women's ordination, was simply too overwhelming. Liberals had not been in the habit of obeying the Bible; why should they obey a church pronouncement?

So what we are seeing are outright acts of desperation, knowing that the division and General Conference cannot grant such permission, although they so much want to do so. It is believed that the time has come to devise ways to cast church law aside—and do it anyway!

Following the Utrecht Session, the two conferences in the United States, which held the most defiant views on the subject, were the first to react.

THE SLIGO ORDINATION

On Tuesday, July 18, 1995 the board of the 3,000-member Sligo Church, our second largest in North America and, equally significant, the one attended by many of our General Conference officers and staff—voted to ordain their women as associate pastors!

On Tuesday, July 18, 1995 the Sligo Church board, in a formal business session, voted 138 to 21 to defy the Utrecht decision, made only a few

weeks earlier—and ordain their women pastors. They also appointed an eight-member *Ad hoc Commission* [*ad hoc* = appointed for a special purpose] to oversee the process.

On Sabbath, September 23, 1995 the ordination took place. Church leaders from across the nation were reported to have been present. See *Women's Ordination at Sligo—Part 1-3* [WM-649-651] for additional details.

One believer, after reading that *Waymarks* report, wrote this:

"I cannot see how those women could work for that senior pastor at Sligo, Rudy Torres, and let him put his hand on their head—in view of what he has done." They are referring to our earlier report about his prior divorce and remarriage, *The Torres Case—Part 1-4* [WM-583-586]; also see *Keeping Adulterous Pastors—Part 1-2* [WM-587-588] and *When a Pastor Violates the Seventh - Permitting Adultery in the Church - Church Protection Guaranteed* [WM-601].

SOUTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

On Friday, July 7, 1995 only two days after women's ordination was voted down at Utrecht, the La Sierra University Church board met. Following heated discussion, they voted to convene a church business meeting, and recommend that it ask the SECC Executive Committee, by November 1, to approve ordination of women to the ministry.

On Monday, July 10, 1995 Dan Smith, the church's senior pastor, sent out a two-page letter, calling for a special church business meeting to be held on the next Sabbath afternoon at 2 p.m.

At that July 15 meeting, during the holy hours of the Sabbath, there was more discussion and argument about the politics of the matter. It was finally voted to request the conference office to approve women's ordination by November 1.

On Sunday, August 6, 1995 the SECC Executive Committee met and, after wrangling awhile, voted to ask the SECC constituency to decide the matter.

That brings us up to date on all the post-Utrecht events, detailed in *Defying the General Conference Session* [WM-642] and *The Women's Ordination at Sligo—Part 1-3* [WM-649-651].

PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

On August 30, 1995, the PUC Executive Committee met and was presented with a set of recommendations to be approved and sent on to the conferences. It listed a number of ways that women could be elevated to higher positions of leadership in the church.

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION COMMITTEE

On October 13-14, 1995 at the Year-end Meeting of the North American Division, the top leaders in our division approved the establishment of a *Presidential Commission on Women and the Ministry*, to make this approval of rebellion even more official. It is the assignment of that committee to find excuses to explain away the rebellion over ordination, while keeping the rebellious liberals in the ranks of the ongoing apostasy.

SOUTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

On September 21, 1995 the SECC Executive Committee met for a crucial discussion of the women's ordination matter. This might be the last opportunity for SECC leadership to defuse the situation.

After the meeting, Lynn Mallery, conference president (and earlier editor of Knoche's western movie, *The Lost Burro Mine*), published a two-page report on that meeting, its conclusions, and the position of SECC leadership in the matter. Initially published as the October 1995 issue of *Conference Priorities*, it was reprinted in the October 16 issue of the *Pacific Union Conference Recorder*.

Larry Geraty, president of La Sierra University, introduced the meeting by declaring that, if the committee members did not approve the rebellion, "they would perish."

Disobey and live, was his message. Disobey church leaders and you will do fine in Southeastern.

At this meeting, as at the earlier ones, the members openly argued about which policy to follow. Some demanded immediate approval, while others said to wait. However an unofficial tally revealed that only two of the 25 present opposed the ongoing rebellion! (2 out of 25!) According to Mallery, of those leaders (among whom were Thomas Mostert, the union president) 23 wanted the conference to revolt. The only thing they did not agree on was the procedure for doing it! Here are Mallery's words:

Ultimately, the committee decided to "commission" all ministerial candidates—and wait for the present.

LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY CHURCH ORDINATION

On November 11, 1995 a LSU Church constituency meeting was held. Discussion centered on arrangements for a forthcoming women's ordination. Of the 300 present, 270 voted in favor of the ordination.

On December 2, 1995 the LSU Church women's ordination was held. Two women were ordained.

VICTORIA CHURCH ORDINATION

On December 2, 1995 one woman was ordained to the ministry at a church near Loma Linda.

CONFERENCE AND UNION LEVEL WOMEN'S ORDINATION AT SLIGO CHURCH

In May 1996, the Potomac Conference Committee met in a duly-called meeting—and voted its approval of the forthcoming ordination of a woman to the ministry!

Shortly afterward, in the same month, the Columbia Union Conference Committee met in solemn session—and added its approval to this ordination.

On June 22, 1996, the ordination of one (and possibly two) women occurred at Sligo Church. This is the largest church in the area where the General Conference, North American Division, and Columbia Union Conference are located.

All the conference and union officers were present at the ordination, all were on the platform, and all spoke favorably about the occasion, at which nine women and eight men received ordination or commissioning. Division and General Conference representatives also took part.

This brings the present total to six or seven women (not certain as we go to press) who have been ordained to the ministry in four services.

Where to learn more:

- WM-404 ORDINATION OF MINISTERS June 92
- WM-481-485 WOMEN'S ORDINATION Part 1-5 Aug 93-Sep 93
- WM-536 NEWS NOTES: JULY 94 Aug 94 Pushing for regional black California conference; Southeastern demands women's ordination; Tell your children about tobacco
- WM-598-599 WOMEN'S ORDINATION CRISIS: 1995 Part 1-2 Mar 95
- WM-646 ELDER DAMSTEEGT SPEAKS: The Truth about Women's Ordination Sept 95
- WM-649-651 WOMEN'S ORDINATION AT SLIGO Part 1-3 Oct 95
- WM-652-653 WOMEN'S ORDINATION REBELLION: OCT 95 UPDATE Part 1-2 Nov 95
- WM-663-665 LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY CHURCH ORDAINS WOMEN MINISTERS Part 1-3 Dec 95
- WM-667 LESSONS FROM THE CHRISTIAN REFORM CHURCH Jan 96
- WM-717-718 THE FIRST CONFERENCE APPROVED WOMEN'S ORDINATION Part 1-2 Sept 96

dination Certificate, with no further service, as soon as women are approved by the General Conference to receive that Credential.”

Then, along with several others, on Sabbath afternoon, June 22, 1996, Esther Knott was ordained to the gospel ministry. The printed program of that event, of which we have a copy, says this on page 15:

“I am grateful to the executive committees of the Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union Conference, who have gone on record as approving me for ordination to the ministry. Even so, we here today recognize that we must wait some time before the larger fellowship of believers around the world is ready for us to use that term.”

STEP BY STEP

What does all this mean?

Following the 1990 refusal at Indianapolis, the 1995 Utrecht Session also voted down the ordination request of the North American Division. At the time, it was generally recognized that Utrecht would be the last time the North American liberals might be able to obtain such approval from a Session.

Following that action, the liberals in America swung into action and began ordaining woman ministers anyway. At that time, the excuse offered by leadership on all levels was that these were only “local church” ordinations, and had not been approved by local conference or union committees; therefore they were not significant.

Both Al McClure, president of the North American Division, and Robert Folkenberg, president of the General Conference, have repeatedly stated that those women’s ordinations did not matter, since no conference or union committee had ever approved such an ordination.

Well, now it has happened. The next step into open rebellion has occurred.

First, women’s ordinations were done, but without higher echelon approval.

Next a local conference and union committee go on record as officially approving the ordination itself. And, at the ordination service, as we shall learn below, their presidents and office staff express fullest acceptance of the ceremony. —But the certificate of ordination is not handed out.

That will be the next step.

No matter how torturous and circuitous the path may be, as long as it pleases the liberals, it is eventually followed. The liberals lead the way and the whole church follows. The liberals must always be appeased; their demands always met.

THE ORDINATION SERVICE

The 20-page ordination service booklet is remarkable for its revelations. Let us consider several of them.

(A photocopy of this program may be obtained from us for a \$10 donation. Request a copy of the “June 22, 1996, Esther Knott Ordination Program.”)

The service was entitled, *“An Afternoon of Affirmation with Joyful Praise: A Service of Commissioning and Ordination to Ministry - Sabbath June 22, 1996.”*

WHO WERE ORDAINED OR COMMISSIONED

And that is what it was: a mixture of ministerial ordinations and school teacher “commissionings.”

Seventeen people received the service. Of them, nine were women and eight were men.

Regarding the eight men who were ordained or commissioned, we have the following information:

- S. Kurt Allen - an accountant who is associate treasurer of the Potomac Conference.
- Israel Castro - a bookkeeper who is the Sligo Church’s business administrator.
- Bradley Durby - a physical education teacher and sports coach at Takoma Academy.
- Kent Greve - principal of Roanoke Adventist Preparatory School.
- Phillip Hamman - rural pastor in Virginia.
- Joseph Jiao - pastor of the Capital Chinese Church.
- Richard Maloon - teacher at Richmond Adventist Academy.
- Velyo Vinglas - associate treasurer/auditor of the Potomac Conference.

Regarding the nine women who were ordained or commissioned, we have the following information:

- Laurie Kelly - a conference school teacher.
- Joyce Martin - a school teacher. (The only black. She is not related to Ralph Martin the union president.)
- Julie Mowry - a first-grade teacher at Sligo School.
- Joyce Onuska - a conference school teacher.
- Velda Ruby - a third-grade teacher at John N.

Continued on the next tract

More WAYMARKS - from —
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Continued from the preceding tract in this series

Andrews School.

Heather Stuyvesant - a teacher at Vienna Junior Academy.

Cheryl Williams - a teacher at Echo Valley Academy.

Mary Sheffer - assistant treasurer in the Potomac Conference.

Esther Fern Ramharacksingh Knott - associate pastor on the staff of Sligo Church.

Which of the above were "ordained to the ministry," and which were "commissioned"? This is not clearly stated in the program; but it appears likely that the teachers were commissioned, and those who are carrying on pastor work or employed in the conference office, were ordained.

In the case of Esther Knott, the program specifically states that she was ordained to the ministry, and that it was done with conference and union approval (p. 15).

However, it is likely that Mary Ann Sheffer, "Potomac Conference Assistant Treasurer" (p. 19), was also ordained to the ministry. It is standard procedure to ordain conference accountants.

WHO CONDUCTED THE SERVICE

Following a call to worship and a "sacred concert," the processional entered. All those who participated took part ("candidates, spouses, and speakers").

After a congregational hymn, Elder Herbert H. Broeckel, president of the Potomac Conference, rose and gave the opening remarks. By so doing, he pronounced his blessing on the women's ordination which was performed that day.

Not only had Potomac Conference approved the action, but its president participated in ordaining the two women.

It should be kept in mind that Broeckel is also on the North American Division Committee. There can be little doubt that Elder McClure's office knew about this ordination.

Following special music, Elder Roger Weiss arose to introduce the speaker. Weiss is the sec-

retary of the Potomac Conference, and also serves as secretary of the conference committee. He, the head treasurer (who also took part in the service), and President Broeckel are the three highest officers in the Potomac Conference.

Who gave the principal address at this service? None other than Elder Gary B. Patterson—formerly high up in the North American Division office, and now a General Field Secretary of the General Conference! You can know that he would not dare take part in that service without approval from the highest levels of world headquarters.

Then, following a "Litany of Affirmation" and a "Call to Ministry," candidates and church officials knelt for the official ordination prayer. This is the moment when the actual ordination occurs.

—And who gave that prayer—as conference, union, and General Conference leaders placed their hands on the heads of the candidates? None other than Herbert H. Broeckel, president of Potomac Conference.

(All the key conference and union leaders knelt on that platform and took part in the ordination. It is clear, from the program, that they were on the platform that day.)

When all had arisen, the "Charge to the Ministry" was given. This "charge" extends over two pages of the official program (pp. 6-7). First, according to the program, the "President" spoke. This would probably be the Potomac Conference president, Elder Broeckel. Then the "Potomac Officers" spoke in unison. This would be the conference officers, on whatever level they might be. Then the "Candidates" spoke, followed by "Potomac, Union, & Division Officers." **—That includes every leader in Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union! But it also includes more than one officer from the North American Division office!!** Who were they? (One may have been Frank Ottati, who is on the Division Committee. *See next page where we mention him; and also page 8, for page reprint.*)

After this, the "Candidates" spoke again in unison, followed by "Officers & Congregation." This was followed by "Candidates," "Potomac Officers," "Candidates," "President," and "Candidates." (*See reprinted pages on page 8 of this tract set.*)

The fullest blessing and approval of the en-

tire conference and union staff were publicly given, in person, at this women's ordination ceremony!

No one can say that the conference and union leadership were "outvoted" by liberals on their committees, and they had no part in what went on.

Although Elder Ralph Martin, Columbia Union Conference president, apparently spoke with the other union leaders in giving the "charge"; so far he had not specifically been named in the program.

At this juncture, the official "Welcome to Ministry" is given (p. 8). This consists of four paragraphs; the first is given by "G. Patterson" (the field secretary in the General Conference), **the second is by "R. Martin" (the president of the Columbia Union)**, the third is by "F. Ottati" (Frank X. Ottati is a member of the North American Division Committee), and the fourth is by "All Administrators."

—These constitute a "Welcome to the Ministry"! What stronger expression of leadership approval, by the conference, union, and General Conference than we find here in this "Charge to the Ministry" and "Welcome to the Ministry"?

At this point, we should note something rather strange: All the church officers conducting the ordination service appear to only be conference, union, and General Conference personnel. Did anyone represent the local church (Sligo) where the service was held? This was definitely a conference and union event! Even the Division sent officers to take part in the service. With Gary Patterson on the program also, we have all levels of leadership represented, from local conference to General Conference.

After a congregational hymn, the presentation of certificates is made, under the direction of Elder Marvin Griffin. He is the head treasurer of the Potomac Conference.

There is no indication, on the printed program, that only some of the seventeen candidates received "certificates." Perhaps they all did—including Esther Knott and Mary Sheffer.

Then, following another congregational hymn, the "Words of Dismissal" are pronounced by Elder Broeckel, the conference president.

At last the conference and union level has been breached. Approval of women's ordination services has finally received the hearty approval of leadership. Indeed, tacit approval was also given by the General Conference.

The astounding fact is that this landmark woman's ordination took place with the approval of the conference and union committees—where our North American Division and General Con-

ference headquarters are located!

THE "TOWN HALL" STATEMENT

Oddly enough, a few weeks later, on August 3, 1996, Elder Folkenberg publicly stated that **the several women's ordinations which had already taken place were of no particular significance, since they had not been approved by a conference or union committees!**

We have that on tape. Here is a transcript of the salient part of that Sabbath afternoon session; Robert Folkenberg speaking:

"I think you are well-acquainted with the position that I took in Utrecht. But I hope you're also well-aquainted with the position I've taken since then. And that is [that] the world church gave an answer to the request, and the request was denied. It is my very strong feeling that the North American Division is a part of the world church, and must be a loyal part of the world church, and respect and accept the decision voted by the world church. Now, having said that, you have heard mention of a local church that conducted a service that the pastor himself described as not claiming authority beyond that local church. [Three local churches did this, not one.]

... really that's where ordinations are voted; they're voted by the union, not by the local church. We have not had any effort, by any union, to ordain women. I don't anticipate that we will; therefore, in my opinion, it is a minor incident.—Robert Folkenberg, statement made at ASI Convention, August 3, 1996.

Please note two points which he made: (1) At one earlier women's ordination, it was specifically stated that the ordination only applied to, and within, that local church. (2) A women's ordination would, indeed, be official when it was approved on the conference or union level.

(1) We can find no indication, in this June 22 service, that the ordination of these women did not apply to the entire conference and union. Note Knott's words that "the larger fellowship of believers around the world" had not yet accepted it. But there was no hint by anyone that, within the territory of the Columbia Union, it was not accepted.

(2) According to Folkenberg's definition, this women's ordination must be quite official, for it received both conference and union approval—and to the fullest possible extent.

When Elder Folkenberg said those words, could he have been ignorant of what transpired only 40 days earlier, a few miles down the road from the General Conference building?

The above statement by Elder Folkenberg is from, what was called, a "Town Hall Meeting." It was

First Conference and Union Approved Women's Ordination _____ 7

a pre-announced question and answer session held at the 1996 ASI Convention in Providence, Rhode Island. This meeting, which convened at 2:30 p.m. on Sabbath afternoon, was moderated by Harold Lance (an attorney and the current ASI president). The speakers were Robert Folkenberg (General Conference president), Alfred McClure (North American Division president), and William Johnsson (editor-in-chief of the *Adventist Review*).

The statement clearly says that, as of June 22, 1996, women's ordination ceremonies have not constituted a violation of the Utrecht ruling—because they have consistently not been approved by conference or union committees.

That statement was made on August 3. In May, McClure and Folkenberg and Johnsson's own conference and union committees met and gave such approval.

On June 22, less than six weeks before Folkenberg spoke those words, the approved ordination took place—accompanied by a print statement, which was handed to the packed 2,000-seat audience in attendance. That statement specifically said that the ordination of at least one of the women had both conference and union approval,

The situation is serious, and becomes more serious as the months pass. A policy of ignoring Scripture and pleasing men has brought our leaders to this impasse. They see no way out, except to keep moving downward.

(A photocopy of this program may be obtained from us for a \$10 donation. Request a copy of the "June 22, 1996, Esther Knott Ordination Program.")