

women's ordination rebellion: october 1995 update

PART ONE OF TWO

There continues to be new developments in the ongoing rebellion, by local churches and conferences in the North American Division, in regard to the matter of women's ordination.

We will first provide you with a brief review of earlier events, and then we will discuss the latest developments in the revolt by local church units against the decision of the Utrecht delegates.

EARLIER EVENTS

On Wednesday, July 5, 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 any way!

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, 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, 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, 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, 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, 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, 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]*.

THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

EXPLAINING AWAY THE SLIGO ORDINATION

On page 3 of this report is a box which details the subsequent efforts of church leaders to explain away the Sligo ordination of two of its women pastors as inconsequential.

Church leaders now declare that it is perfectly acceptable for

local congregations to ordain people to the gospel ministry without conference, union, General Conference, or Session approval! How is that for a turnabout? Faithful believers are cast out for upholding the right, while rebellious liberals are pampered when they openly rebel against church authority.

The liberals in our denomination are taking us down the road to modernism, Protestantism, and Catholicism, and church leaders are placidly cooperating with them.

Yet every student of church history knows that *separate ordination of ministers is always the basis of a separate organizational structure*. That is why the “congregationalist” denominations are called just that: Each local church is a law unto itself, and is not amenable to any higher earthly authority.

Church leaders are now excusing the Sligo action and declaring it to merely be a ministerial ordination by a local congregation, something which is perfectly acceptable.

Frankly, the denomination is gradually breaking up, and leaders are more concerned about holding onto their jobs than in confronting issues. They want peace in their time.

And that has been the underlying problem throughout this crisis, which came to light in our division in the early 1980s.

For fifteen years, church leaders have appeased the liberals in the church—by easing standards, watering down crucial beliefs, and pushing out faithful members who protest the growing apostasy.

And now the time has come when, having cast off the laws of God, men are willing to cast off the policies of the organization.

Leaders issued them a license to rebel, and they are going to use it. It is a dangerous thing when religious leaders tell their members that they can disobey the laws of God with impunity; yet that is what

the new theology teaches. Now that attitude of lawlessness is coming home to roost.

This is what happened in France, and the French revolution was the result. First the godly Huguenots were driven out, and later the worldly citizenry which remained turned on the priests and slew them.

On October 13-14, 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. —See the box on the next page for more information on this. It will be the assignment of that committee to find excuses to explain away the rebellion over ordination, while keeping the rebellious in the ranks of the ongoing apostasy.

Thus it was in the Roman Catholic Church: When someone arose who stood for principles or policies which were in defiance of church politics, he was handed a robe, appointed the head of a new order, and assigned agents to help water down his objectives until, within a generation, they agreed with those of Rome.

SOUTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

As the situation heated up, the officers of the Pacific Union Conference were busy at work, trying to douse the flames of liberal rebellion.

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.

It is of interest that those enacted resolutions preceded by more than a month the appointment of a special commission by the North American Division to devise ways to do the same thing. (See box on

next page.)

On September 21, 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*.

Here is a brief analysis of this article, which is reprinted on page four of this report.

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.

The priorities of God's faithful ones should be different. First and foremost, we should obey God's Inspired Writings. These men are urging a rebellion based on a rejection of Scripture. But before man's sayings comes God's Word.

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:

“As the day progressed, it became apparent that any division on

EXPLAINING AWAY THE SLIGO SERVICE

You will recall our recent tract set on this *event* (*Women's Ordination at Sligo—Part 1-3 [WM-649-651]*). The efforts of leadership to explain away this act of rebellion as being nothing more than a “reaffirmation” continue apace.

The Sligo Church board specifically intended to provide that which the Utrecht Session voted down (full-blown women's ministerial ordination) to its three woman pastors. But under strong pressure from higher church leadership, Rudy Torres sent out an open letter on September 9, in an effort to soften the shock wave: “The service is an ordination to the local church only, and we do that on the very same authority that we ordain deacons, deaconesses, and local elders. We will simply recognize that those ordained in that service have a more comprehensive call to engage in ministry in our area than those who usually serve as local elders.”

In other words, he was trying

to deny that it would be a ministerial ordination for women, yet that is what it was—and what speakers and printed bulletins at the service declared, when it occurred on September 23.

More than 1,100 people packed into the building, including more than 30 women pastors from 10 different states! The meaning was obvious; it was not a breakthrough, but a breakout. It was an act of rebellion against the Utrecht vote.

In order to provide further cover for a service, which leadership could not stop, Al McClure issued a public statement before the ceremony, in which he excused it as not unusual and quite acceptable:

“A commissioning or dedicatory service, even with the laying on of hands, is biblical and affirming of the call to ministry, yet does not violate the spirit or the letter of the vote at the General Conference Session.”—*quoted in “Special Service Attracts Wide Interest,” Review, October 12, 1995.*

According to that, any local church can ordain its leaders as ministers. This was confirmed by a statement

by McClure after the service, that “local churches do not have the authority to ordain to the ministry of the world church.”—*Ibid.*

Putting the two official statements together means that each local church can henceforth ordain all the ministers it desires, but they must be newly ordained to the ministry when they move on to another local church.

On October 13-14, in order to cement this approval of rebellion the more firmly, the Year-end Meeting of the North American Division approved the establishment of a Presidential Commission on Women and the Ministry, to make this approval of rebellion even more official.

Yet everyone acquainted with church history, down through the centuries, knows that independent ordination of ministers only occurs in (1) congregational churches or (2) by new groups breaking away and forming separate churches.

So we now have tacit NAD approval for the action! *For more on this, see Part Two of this two-part tract set.*

the committee was *not* about whether or not women should be ordained. A straw poll taken revealed that committee members favored the concept of the ordination of women by a 23 to 2 margin. So the discussion centered more on *how best to accomplish it.*—“*SECC Executive Committee Votes on Women's Ordination,*” in *Pacific Union Recorder, October 16, 1995 [italics his].*

Ultimately, the SECC Executive Committee agreed that, although it was clearly in favor of bolting from obedience to the General Conference Session mandate, it should not take the lead in doing so—but only *recommend* to the next SECC constituency meeting that *it* enact the act of rebellion! Is my language too strong? No, read Mallery's report for yourself (*on page 4*).

Ultimately, the committee decided to “commission” all ministerial candidates—until the October constituency meeting convened; at which time they could go ahead and approve a full-scale ordination service for women, a service which would be equal to that given to men. The point of this is that no intern in Southeastern will be issued the ministers' ordination papers—until the women can also receive them.

In his report, Mallery stated that Utrecht had rejected “a plan to let each division make their [sic.] own decision on the issue.” Then, in the next paragraph, he said that SECC leadership sees nothing wrong with letting each conference make its own decision on the issue.

Mallery then went on to explain that SECC would not be doing anything wrong, because only that con-

ference would be acting independently. Yet it was just such independent actions which were specifically rejected at Utrecht!

The final decision of this SECC Executive Committee was that the conference would postpone the matter until the next regular conference constituency meeting, which would be held in October 1996.

We now await the November 1 deadline, which the La Sierra Church business meeting set on Sabbath, July 15. Will the La Sierra Church bolt and begin ordaining women after that date, without waiting for the conference to approve such ordinations?

The positions and objectives of North American Division leadership are stated on the next tract (Part Two) in this study.