

AAW 2011 Conference Report

Women gathered at the 2011 Association of Adventist Women Conference at La Sierra University. Seated in front are 2011 Women of the Year: Dr. Myrna Costa, Inter-American Division; Bonnie Dwyer, Editor of *Spectrum*

The 27th conference of the Association of Adventist Women was held October 13-16, 2011, at La Sierra University in Riverside, California.

The Association of Adventist Women made two significant recommendations at their annual conference. The first was in response to the requirement that each division of the world Seventh-day Adventist Church establish a committee to study the theology of ordination and report its findings to the GC Biblical Research Committee. That group would then recommend to the world church, among other things, whether or not women pastors who are commissioned could become conference presidents; and/or if women should be ordained.

The Association voted to recommend to the NAD that 25% of its committee be qualified women Biblical scholars.

The second significant vote, based on the premise that women's voices need to be heard now more than ever, was that AAW meet annually rather than biennially.

The next meeting is planned for October 4-6, at Andrews University.

The men and women attending the conference showed marked enthusiasm for the plenary sessions and the seven break-out sessions on topics ranging from where the Church has been and where it is going; to the challenges women professionals face in a man's world.

In keeping with the theme of the conference, The Total You—Body, Mind, and Spirit, other discussions featured women's health issues, avenues for spiritual growth, and how the Church can support women in ministry.

The highlight of the banquet Sabbath evening was the honoring of Bonnie Dwyer, editor of *Spectrum*, for outstanding achievement, and Myrna Costa, Vice President for Education at the Inter-American Division, for professional life.

At the close of the conference business meeting, the members elected these officers for next year:

1. **President** – Linda Wysong Becker
2. **President-Elect** – Lourdes Morales Mudmundsson
3. **Secretary** – Carolyn Slepnikoff Lacy
4. **Treasurer** – Carmen Cordero
5. **At Large** – Bernie Martin Beck
6. **At Large** – Barbara Prowant
7. **At Large** – Helen Wilson
8. **Director of Development** – Gerogia Hodgkin
9. **Director of Woman-of-the-Year Awards** – Patricia Pearson Johnston
10. **Director of Communication** – Trisha Famisaran – resigned
11. **Director of Annual Meeting** – Stella Greig
12. **Co-Director of Membership** – Penny Gustofson Miller
13. **Co-Director of Membership** – Cheryl Simmons
14. **Senior Advisor** – Helen Ward Thompson Zolber

Official Actions Taken at the 2011 AAW Conference

AAW Board Members attending the 2011 AAW Conference: Front Row: Dr. Helen Zolber, Pastor Cheryl Simmons, Dr. Linda Becker – President, Barbara Prowant, JD, Dr. Lourdes Gudundsson – President Elect, Dr. Pat Johnston

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. VOTED to recommend that each Biblical Research Institute studying the ordination of women have at least one female on the committee. The motion was amended to recommend that 25 percent of the committee be qualified female theologians.
2. Recommended that a copy of the book Women in Ministry by Nancy Vyhmeister be sent to every Division.
3. VOTED that AAW study ways of developing a mentoring program and providing anticipatory socialization experiences for young Adventist women.

COMMENDATIONS

1. VOTED that the President of the North American Division be commended for his active support for women in ministry.

Psssst! You can't keep this secret!

The Association of Adventist Women is offering \$10 off the normal membership rate until July 1. This means that your annual membership will be \$25 instead of \$35 for the year. Just mention "SECRET" on your registration form.

This secret is too good to keep, so share it with a friend!

Message from the President Linda Wright Wysong Becker

Dear Adventist Women:

We wish you all could have met with the 40 to 60 women and men who gathered at La Sierra University for the 27th annual Association of Adventist Women Conference. The speakers were inspiring, thought-provoking, imaginative, and hopeful despite the challenging times we face for women in leadership and ministry in the Adventist Church.

Many of us came away with a renewed sense of the importance of our work in supporting women in leadership and ministry within the Adventist Church. It was inspiring to hear Chris Oberg talk about the real issues facing women in ministry, and to see her model ministry to her congregation. It was also eye-opening to understand that, 26 years after the organization was formed, we still have a major work to do before equity happens within the church. It will take each of us, working in our sphere of influence, to help this equity happen for our daughters and grand-daughters.

From the first warm welcome by La Sierra University President Randall Wisbey to the last animated conversation following the business meeting on Saturday night, the tone was forward thinking and positive. Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson, the local coordinator, brought together a wonderful panoply of music, thought, and discussion.

Women are resilient! That was one of the major thoughts that impressed me about the conference. We see a challenge and set our determination toward finding ways to make a contribution, serving others with the gifts God has given us, and overcoming the obstacles that may be placed before us.

Listening to the presentations, panel discussions, and conversations at breaks and meal times convinced me that God is in control, and he is working in the lives of women and men to hasten his coming.

Several important resolutions were passed at the business meeting; you will find them elsewhere in the newsletter. We also want to welcome several new board members to AAW: Helen Wilson, from Adventist Health Systems West; Penny Miller, from Loma Linda area; Carmen Cordero, from La Sierra University; and Bernie Beck from Oregon. Each of these women brings talents to our team that will help to make the organization stronger and more relevant. Also included in this newsletter is a list of AAW officers for the coming year.

Plan now to attend the next AAW Conference at Andrews University, October 4-7, 2012. Put the date on your calendar, and tell your friends to join you for an inspiring weekend.

Linda Wysong Becker, President
Association of Adventist Women
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Matching Pledge Opportunity for Updating AAW Website

Members of AAW have an exciting opportunity to match a \$1,500 pledge that has been donated by two AAW board members to update the AAW website. The AAW website has become an important vehicle of communication to members world-wide and is in great need of a facelift. We are hoping to match this pledge by June 30, 2012. This would enable AAW members to more easily navigate through history, presentations, papers, Women-of-the-Year awardees and much more that is available on the website.

Your contributions to this match are tax deductible and will be greatly appreciated. You may make a contribution by going to the AAW website and clicking on Make a Donation; or by mailing a check to:

Association of Adventist Women
P. O. Box 25025
Seattle, WA 98165

AAW Woman-of-the-Year Nominations for 2012

The Association of Adventist Women (AAW) is soliciting nominations for its 2012 Woman-of-the-Year Awards that will be presented at the annual AAW conference to be held at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, October 4-7, 2012.

"Too often the enormous contributions of Seventh-day Adventist women are overlooked," says Toini Harrison, former coordinator of the Woman-of-the-Year Awards.

Nominees should be Seventh-day Adventist women who have made outstanding and unique contributions to home, community, and/or professional life. The deadline for submitting nominations is June 1, 2012.

For further information send an e-mail (preferable) or write to the following address:

Patricia Johnston
16500 Kingsley Court
Lakeville, MN 55044
pjohnston@frontiernet.net

Ways to Support AAW

Make a charitable donation to AAW. Renewing your membership helps keep AAW alive. Not already an AAW member? Become a member.

Farewell

Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse

Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse, 1995 Woman-of-the-Year Award recipient, passed away early on the morning of August 30, 2011 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester. She was 88.

Born on Oct. 15, 1922, Dr. Rittenhouse became a musician, performer and conductor whose mission was to unite people through the power of music. She led an orchestra of young people on tours around the world and conducted her New England Youth Ensemble at the 2010 General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Rittenhouse is survived by Harvey Rittenhouse, her husband of 61 years, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Mel Harris

Mel Harris, husband of Margaret "Peggy" Harris, 1990-1992 AAW President, died September 20, 2011.

Harris was hospitalized 13 days and spent his last day in ICU, where he was put on a respirator and pain medicine. Family and Pastors Glenn and Donna Holland and Senior Pastor Kermit Netteburg were there during Mel's last hours to pray with and bid him farewell.

"He was very touched that our whole pastoral staff was there," said Peggy.

Doctors removed the breathing tube between 3 and 4 p.m.; he stopped breathing at 7 p.m.

According to Peggy, he achieved several goals: he saw their granddaughters graduate from academy and another, Kris, graduate from college and marry. He was looking forward to their first great-grandson.

"God is good," she said. "He gave Mel 81 years and us 59 years together," she said.

A Letter from Esther Diaz and her husband

The following letter was sent to Karen Kotoske from Esther Diaz de Guerrero, 2005 WOYA recipient. She is also the former President of the Adventist Seminary in Cuba.

Hello Karen,

Long ago I was about to write you, but I have always been distracted by other things. The truth is I am always busy. You do not know the joy you gave me when I received your message. I'll always remember you with great fondness. I'm have been retired now for three years, but I continue to teach at the seminary. After this semester I will not continue to teach. My husband cannot stay home alone. This Friday was a Wee of Prayer and I prepared the sacrament. It was very nice. I am sending you a picture of my husband and I and others of the sacrament. I have much work to do because I do my own work in addition to my husbands. I am the Elder of our church and I do some writing for the deacons and deaconesses. I also have a singles club in my church, preach in other churches, and give seminars and other activities. As you can see, I don't have much time left, but I am happy to work for God.

My daughters are in the United States and want us to go there. We are alone here, but I have not decided what we will do. However, if there are any changes I will communicate with you. I would really like you to send me a photo and would like you to tell me more about your humanitarian work. Well, Karen, I will write more later. Remember that here in Cuba we have a house and if we stay here, I wish you would come and spend a few days with us and getting to know our country.

Esther Diaz

North American Division Unions Affirm Women in Ministry

The year 2012 may be named "Adventist Year of the Woman" judging from a series of recent union-level and local conference decisions to further support the ministry of women by affirming them in the pastoral ministry.

The union and local conference decisions to take up the ordination of qualified candidates to the pastoral ministry, regardless of gender, has been a response to the rescinding of the November 2011 North American Division 's (NAD) decision to allow ordained/commissioned ministers to become conference presidents as a result of legal counsel indicating that the NAD could not make such a decision since they have no separate constituency. However, unions and conferences do have constituencies and therefore are authorized to vote such a decision. (see Bonnie Dwyer, Spectrum Blog)

The ordination of women is a topic whose time has clearly come. Not only have their executive committees affirmed the work of women in traditional female roles, they have made official statements supporting the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

On March 8, 2012 the Mid-America Union Conference was the first to formally vote support for the ordination of eligible candidates to the pastoral ministry, regardless of gender. The rationale included a desire to extend the role of women in the ministries of the church and “that gender should not disqualify any future candidate recommended by local conferences for ordination.”

President Thomas Lemon summarized the meaning of this vote as follows:

1. 1. To affirm the priesthood of all believers, including women, in regards to the call to gospel ministry
2. 2. To support Seventh-day Adventist leaders, including those in North America, as they continue their efforts to follow the guidance of God’s Spirit regarding women in ministry and leadership
3. 3. To create a safe environment for local conferences to continue their own discussion of this subject to help them discern which candidates to recommend for pastoral ordination

On April 5, President Lemon found it necessary to clarify that the union had not voted to ordain women, but that the vote, while reflecting the union’s commitment to work in harmony with the North American Division of the General Conference still remains committed to moving forward on this issue: “What we do know is that we want the world church to understand that, as a committee, we are closely aligned in our support of this cause.”

“Union Committee calls special constituency session to authorize ordinations without regard to gender”)

Following suit, the Southeastern California Conference (SECC), urged by the One in Christ campaign (see One in Christ), issued ordained minister credentials to all its eligible non-intern pastors, regardless of gender. This was the long-awaited outgrowth of the decades-long work of the SECC’s Gender Inclusive Committee and this conference’s history of strongly supporting its women pastors through the ordaining/commissioning process.

In May of this year, the Southern California Conference (SCC) “voted to support ordination of women to the Gospel Ministry in the Southern California Conference and, to encourage the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee to take the necessary steps to implement this action” (See SCC Website). An important contribution was made to the discussion by three surveys conducted by the SCC to assess the perceptions of key constituents (pastors, executive committee members, and lay members of the Region Committees) on the possible ordination of women serving in pastoral ministries. In favor were 76% of the pastors; 63% of executive committee members; and 75% of laity.

The Columbia Union Conference has called a constituency meeting in July “for the purpose of authorizing ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender”. In March, the Potomac Conference voted “to request the Potomac Conference Standing Articles & Bylaws committee to begin a review process of its bylaws that would enable us to ordain women”

Likewise the Atlantic Union Conference at its regularly scheduled quarterly union executive committee voted a statement in support of women’s roles in a wide spectrum of ministries,

including the pastoral ministry, although no mention was made of approving gender-neutral ordination. Most recently the North Pacific Union Conference (NPUC) Executive Committee voted to appoint an ad hoc committee that can bring recommendations “on how to fully integrate committed and called Adventist women into all levels of church leadership within the NPUC territory.”

In Europe, the North German Union Conference (within the Euro-Africa Division) took a further step to “ordain female pastors within the NDV[Union]equally to their male colleagues” and have amended their constitution to ensure equal rights to ordination, regardless of gender.

Although most of the unions in the NAD that have participated in this movement have followed approved General Conference policies allowing unions to make decisions regarding who should or should not be ordained, some are still reluctant to do so without the express approval of the GC. For example, the Southern Union Conference expressed its support for women in all ministries, but stopped short of seeking changes at the union level that might facilitate gender-neutral ordination.

One of the most significant outgrowths of this movement to support the role of women in the pastoral ministry was the Conference for Women Clergy held in Berrien Springs on April 23-26, 2012. Sponsored by the North American Division, the conference took a significant step toward acknowledging the contributions of women who already function as pastors and chaplains. In attendance were Division, Union, and Conference administrators who were present to show their support for women in ministry and to share the history of women clergy in the Adventist church, including Pastor Stan Hickerson’s noting that a high point for women in ministry was 1878 when 10% of the pastoral staff in Michigan were women. Although the survey indicates a strong support for gender-neutral ordination across the worldwide church, there seem to be equally strong feelings that unions should go ahead and approve inclusive ordination and report on this approval at the next General Conference, in session.

The Association of Adventist Women (AAW) celebrates the conversations and actions that are helping the Church here and elsewhere recognize the contributions its women have historically made to what we are today as a world church and value the unique role women can play in the “loud cry” in these last days of earth’s history. It can only bode well for the mission and witness of the Adventist church that this “grass roots” movement to enable and empower men as well as women for the mission of the church should coincide with the General Conference’s launching of a worldwide evangelistic initiative in the cities of the world. The AAW lends its voice and support to both movements.

Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson, Ph.D.

President-elect, Association of Adventist Women

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