

What Are the Positive Aspects of Ordaining Women?

The church has much to gain from ordaining women. Focusing on gifts rather than gender roles will begin to fully honor the individuality God holds sacred for each of us, and it will produce a community created and perpetuated by Christian process. The many positive elements center in two areas: those for the full church and those more specifically for women.

A Doubled Impact

The first consideration for the church is, very simply, a church that fully embraces all of its members doubles its impact. To ignore the calling of women is to ignore half of our resources. When women cannot be ordained, they are seen as ancillary resources to be employed under men's direction. The effect of women's minds and energies will be evident only when they have equal influence on decision-making.

Ordination will allow the church to hear women and engage them rather than merely tolerate them. It will allow us to welcome women as shapers of church growth in theology, morality, scholarship, policy, and economics. When our church moves from its traditional, singular world view to a more inclusive world view, we will be able to see that sharing or giving away power

expands rather than reduces that power. Thus, our Christian community will be the richer for women's full participation.

Of particular concern ought to be the effect on Seventh-day Adventist young people. Many young people have told us that denying the full participation of women has restricted the interest of both young women and young men in church service. Most twenty-first century women who see open career opportunities in all areas except their church will not choose professional church work; they will not place themselves on ministerial tracks in which they will be viewed as problems rather than as contributors to a new level of dialogue.

Having been treated as partners in other areas of their lives, both young women and men will look to God's goals and purposes for their lives as the basis for contradicting present reality when it is dehumanizing. The argument that "ordination is not really important; women can do everything without it" will not wash. Young people know that the

names and categories we select do create reality; they know that ordained and unordained are both different and unequal. However, when the church makes this move toward honoring all who are called to ministry, young men

and women will be able to create a new partnership in theology from which can emerge a more inclusive, unified, and peaceful Christian community.

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Second, and even more important than numbers or product, is process: a healthy church must adopt healthy processes. When the church chooses to limit freedom, to restrict affirmation, to practice injustice, and to underuse half of its resources, it chooses to live and to shape its future in ways that are incompatible with Christianity. Each day, as it makes decisions, spends money, and charts directions, it allows itself to practice non-Christian process. When it places itself at odds with its core, it risks its own undoing, for it can make bad decisions and recover, but it cannot survive with bad processes. In contrast, when the church commits itself to gender equality, it also reaps the benefits of engaging in healthy processes.

A third benefit that will flow from our church's reflecting on gender equality is that both men and women will be called to a new humanity in Christ. Men are challenged by Jesus to reject the cultural definition of masculinity as well as all of the patriarchal structures and behaviors that flow from it. In Christ, they have the assurance that there is another and truly redemptive way to be a man. Women are challenged to develop a renewed sense of themselves as creatures of God made in the Divine image, as sisters and friends of Jesus who have put on Christ and who are called and empowered to represent Christ in church and society. The traits and virtues that women have experienced as marks of inferiority will be seen in the light of the lifestyle of Jesus, who validates them and proposes them to both men and women as the practice of the reign of God.

Benefits for All

The positive aspects for the full church, women and men, are compelling. However, the positive aspects for women are equally important, for a Christian church must be willing to act when more

than half of its body is denied freedom, affirmation, and justice.

The church holds sacred the freedom that God allows us, and even encourages us, to use responsibly. We believe that as Christians we are called to examine our gifts and to use them fully, a calling that leads some women to ministry. Thus, fully embracing freedom means ordaining women to whatever ministerial callings they receive.

If, in fact, we cherish the freedom that God has given us, we must nurture it by affirming women's calling to ministry with ordination. A calling as sacred as Gospel ministry has merited and continues to merit ordination in our church. Without ordination, women can do much of the work of the church, but they can do little decision-making, even in matters that pertain primarily to women. They are not free to aspire to church administration, and they are not affirmed when a ceiling remains on their recognition. Thus, the church must choose either to affirm all through ordination, both women and men, or not to use ordination as affirmation for either men or women. Only then will the church fully acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of *all*, women and men, whom God calls to Gospel ministry,

Finally, the church must practice justice. Our church will practice injustice as long as it continues to create false categories and boundaries. Rather than gender politics, it must practice freedom, affirmation, and Christian justice.

Very simply, ordaining women just as we ordain men requires us to give up nothing we need and allows us to gain everything. We will have acted justly when we affirm all members' freedom to respond to God's calls, we will have doubled our resources when we use all of these members fully, and we will have set ourselves on a positive course when we practice new creation principles by deliberately choosing an inclusive gospel-based governance process.