

Adventists vote against women's ordination

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [August 5, 2015](#) issue

Seventh-day Adventists voted 1,381 to 977 at their 60th General Conference Session in San Antonio not to allow their regional church bodies to ordain women pastors.

Tense discussions prior to the July 8 vote featured dozens of delegates voicing opinions for and against the question, “Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry?”

Despite the ban, several U.S. conferences of Seventh-day Adventists have ordained women in recent years. Several of the church’s 13 worldwide divisions—with a total of 18 million members—have approved theological reviews suggesting that women’s ordination should be widely accepted. Women pastors have often held a “commissioned” credential without being formally ordained in the church, which observes its sabbath on Saturday.

Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, who cast a “no” vote, was reelected to a second five-year term earlier in the meeting.

“We have today a spiritual opportunity to refocus our attention on mission and turn our eyes away from this subject,” he said moments after the vote was announced. “You may guard an opinion, but let’s be careful how we express it and move ahead.”

During the debate, Jan Paulsen, worldwide president from 1999 to 2010, spoke at a microphone between statements from delegates and explained his support for a “yes” vote.

“Voting ‘no’ will do damage to our church,” Paulsen said.

During the session, people spoke before writing their votes on secret ballots.

“I am a young woman, a young adult, an ethnic minority, and a leader of one of the largest youth movements in Adventism,” said Natasha Nebblett, president of Generation of Youth for Christ. “God has already called me to work for him and that is all the calling that I need.”

She was followed immediately by Cheryl Doss, head of the denomination's Institute of World Mission, who argued that it was not necessary for the church's 13 world divisions to operate in the same way, just as body parts do not have the same functions.

"If one part of the body will function better if women are ordained, then that is what they should do," said Doss, a professor of world mission at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

More than a hundred others stood in line to speak but time ran out before they could comment.

"Delegates on both sides recognize how divisive and time- and energy-consuming this debate is, but this vote will not settle the question," said Laura Vance, a sociologist at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina, who has studied women within Adventism and was a visitor at the gathering.

Garrett Caldwell, spokesman for the worldwide denomination, said current officers are "not concerned about a split."

Before the vote had been tallied, Caldwell said the status of women who have been ordained by local church bodies despite the church's official position "will remain the same." —Religion News Service

*This article was edited on July 21, 2015.*