

THIRD BUSINESS MEETING

Sixty-First General Conference Session, June 6, 2022, 7:00 p.m.

[Prayer by Abner De Los Santos]

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: We are ready to move. It is evening. We will move now to our *Church Manual*. Pastor Billy Biaggi is here, and Gerson Santos is our secretary of the *Church Manual* Committee. This morning we had the opportunity to read Numbers, Chapter 27, where we find some beautiful ideas about how important it is to trust in God. When I read the chapter this morning, I discovered that we should learn to trust in God's promises. We are challenged to be diligent, to claim the person the Lord has for us and ensure our right to our heavenly inheritance. God's grace makes no difference between men and women. And God invites us to honor the memory of our parents, of our ancestors, and to look by faith for the land of promises. We are also challenged to pray for the leadership God's people need because that's what Moses did. He prayed for God's people to have a good leader. And we pray for the leadership of the Church. We pray for this special Session. And I think we are ready.

GERSON SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. And, as we move on to the items in the *Church Manual*, let me tell you this, we still have a long way to go, but we had a good start this afternoon. As you remember, we stopped on item 404. Now we're going to the agenda item 405, which is on the screen. You see item 427-22. You remember that, right?

You have different numbers. The item number is 405, but you see on the screen identified as 427-22. It is in your agenda, page 58. The rationale for this recommendation from the *Church Manual* is this amendment clarifies some of the organizational aspects of the church business meeting. So, this is the recommendation. It's to amend Chapter 10, page 128, of the *Church Manual*, Business Meetings as follows, and you see the paragraph about . . . "Business meetings shall be held at least once a year. The pastor or the board in consultation with and support of the pastor, calls the meeting. Business meetings

should be announced a week or two in advance at the regular Sabbath worship service, with detail as to time and place. The pastor, an elder chosen by the pastor, or, in some cases, the conference president, or his designee, serves as chairperson of the business meeting.”

This is to help us to clarify. The word “typically” wasn't very easy to follow, people weren't sure what this meant. We need more clear wording. I suggest we clarify as follows: “The pastor or in his absence, an elder chosen by the pastor, or, in some cases, (if the pastor is not available or during leadership transition) then the conference president or his designee serves as a chairperson.” Mr. Chair, I move we accept this recommendation.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: It is moved and seconded. Any questions?

TRACIE MAFILEO: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for this opportunity. I would like to make a comment, please, about writing style. And I would really like to urge us to, where possible, use inclusive language. I note on line 23, we've used “his designee”, it could be “their designee” to also align with the wording that's been used on line 43 for “their designee”. The *Church Manual* gives us great guidance at the local Church. But it's also a statement to the world about who we are and how we operate. And I would love that statement to reflect love and inclusion that is part of the heart of our God as well. And so, it's really just a comment about using inclusive language. We were able to even understand that our conference presidents at this stage will be male because they need to be ordained, but still the word “their” rather than “his” gives a better picture of inclusion. Thank you.

GERSON SANTOS: Thank you for the comment. I think this is a relevant observation, and I think it is possible with some editing as the delegate mentioned the example of line 43 where we used “their designee.” So, I think it's possible. But we cannot do it here.

JAANUS-JANARI KOGERMAN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to clarify one thing, which is the conference president's designee. Who can that person be, and if this is meant only to be an ordained pastor, which is normal, then maybe we should clarify that in this particular section as well?

Otherwise, it would give an idea that this can be any person but other parts of the *Church Manual* recommend or actually say that only an ordained pastor or a local elder can chair the business meeting.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments. I understand that when the *Church Manual* is speaking about that, it is saying that the president, in this case, could choose one of the departmental directors or those who are regularly working with him who is an ordained pastor.

GERSON SANTOS: You are correct. In most cases that would happen. However, we may have some local fields where the secretary or the treasurer, for example, is more in the line of business and not ministerial and is not an ordained pastor. This wouldn't prevent the president to request the treasurer of the field to lead out in the meeting.

JAANUS-JANARI KOGERMAN: So, the president of the conference can basically appoint any person to lead a church business meeting if he would like to do so, without regards to the ordination status or the office of the local church [member]. If so, then I would recommend only the ordained pastor or an ordained local elder should be presiding over the business meeting.

GERSON SANTOS: I'm taking notes, Pastor Chair. I think this is a very good idea, and I'm taking notes for that, to follow up.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you so much. Thank you. I don't see any other comments.

SANDRA COLON: Thank you so much. Since you are taking notes on this topic, I think it's important to point out that not all pastors of churches are ordained pastors. There are commissioned pastors. And if you limit the language to ordained pastors, you're limiting the movement forward of the work of the Church. So, it's very important for us to think about the language we're using in what we decide to say about what pastors are allowed to do in their church. Because if we're thinking mission minded, we don't want those appointed pastors, whether they have been ordained or commissioned, to have their hands tied in moving forward in completing the mission and the work of the Church they're called to work at. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. You have said something that is really important. You know, we need to move ahead with the mission, and for that reason, we stated in the *Church Manual* that the decision for appointing an individual to fill this role is with the president.

I saw Francois Louw, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

FRANCOIS LOUW: Mr. Chairman, I think in the light of the very good important presentations on the specific proposed amendment, I would wish to place this specific motion on the table and refer it back so that the appropriate input can be considered rather than us voting on it right now. So, Mr. Chairman, I place this motion on the table.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Okay. We think we can decide now to take your advice and send this back to the committee. Thank you.

GERSON SANTOS: We are planning to meet sometime this week and bring it back to the floor. Very good. So, let's move forward to the next section. This is more regarding pastors and elders. And as you follow in your agenda, we will move to reference number, 409-22. The title is "Ordination of Elders." In your agenda, you have it on page 59. The rationale for this recommendation allows for consistency of wording between the sections on elders and deacons, deaconesses and addresses some confusion in areas where women are ordained as elders. So, the recommendation is to read as follows. And you can see in your agenda, if you want to see lines 15 and 16. "When a church in a business meeting votes the election of new elders, it also authorizes their ordination." And on the last paragraph, the last line, you can see, "They are also" -- let's read the whole paragraph.

"Once ordained, elders need not be ordained again if reelected or, upon election as elders of other churches, provided they have maintained regular membership status. They are also qualified to the deaconate." I move, Pastor Chair, we accept the recommendations.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: It is moved and seconded.

GERARD DAMSTEEGT: Mr. Chair, I would like to request to send this amendment back to the *Church Manual* Committee. It is not addressing the confusion of women being ordained as elders. Women elders were voted in an Annual Council but never brought to the General Conference Session, which has been stressed by Ellen White for any major changes. All representatives throughout the whole world need to vote and not a small section in the Annual Council. This amendment allows for a subtle change. Here it is, page 59, "When a church in a business meeting votes the election of new elders, it also authorizes their ordination." This statement certainly allows for the election of women elders. When elected, these women elders are at the same time authorized by the local church to be ordained. An early statement on line 13 qualifies that these new elders may serve as deacons which means that these elders are males. Now, here it is. By removing the word "deacons" and replacing it with the genderless "deaconate" we allow the elders to be either male or female. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the word deaconate to include both deacons and deaconesses. So, substituting the term deaconate is a subtle shift in the manual to legitimize the ordination of women elders, which has never been done in the manual. Here we need to redirect new wording which allows Seventh-day Adventists to depart from the Bible's specific direction that an elder must be a male. I Timothy 3, verse 2. So, the objection is to reject this amendment because it is a departure from --

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. We will consider. But I will hear others who are in queue at the mics. Stefan Giuliani for the Inter-European Division.

STEFAN GIULIANI: Thank you. I think I have just a minor detail I want to address your attention to and that is on line 31. The text uses the word "if someone is reelected", and I think there's another place in the *Church Manual* where we are replacing the word "reelected" to "newly elected" or something so maybe you want to take this into consideration at this place as well.

GERSON SANTOS: Excellent observation. And this shows us that our delegates are doing their homework and reading the agenda. This is exactly one point that will be discussed and presented in a

little while. But we cannot jump into this because this is not the item we are discussing. But the observation is totally correct, and we are bringing this to the floor, but it's not the item yet. It's coming.

CHRISTOPHER HOLLAND: Mr. Chair, the point of order is that the previous speaker moved to refer to committee. No second was asked for and no vote was made on that move to refer to committee.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Do you want to move that?

CHRISTOPHER HOLLAND: So, I will second the move to refer.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. It's moved and seconded to send this item back to the *Church Manual* Committee. Is there any comment about that referral? Yes? James Howard.

JAMES M HOWARD: All right. Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to point out one --

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: You're for the referral. If there is someone who is scanning for the referral, we are ready to hear you, Jeff.

JEFF BROMME: I'm Jeff Bromme and I'm just speaking against the referral and just have a general observation about our work. I think that we have a lot of rewriting going on in this very large group on the heels of some very thoughtful consideration by the committees that put together the proposals. And I would hope that we would not get in the habit of referring back proposal after proposal after proposal so that we can get through the work of what we were told at the beginning of this process was 37 changes. So, without speaking to the merits of whether there should be female elders or not (although as long as I've been around, I've seen female elders), on that principle, I think we should vote against the motion to refer.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Okay. Thank you. Now we are ready to hear Ken Mapp via Zoom from Tobago Mission.

KEN MAPP: Good evening, everybody, wherever you are. I'm speaking simply regarding the referral. I am in full support of it. I think what it sends is a message and because the gentleman who

spoke gave his thesis, and he expressed it very clearly how subtle the adjustment is being made to the way the church runs. And I think it's very, very critical. He hasn't said that it is a bad thing per se, but he's saying send it back. It's not a case of us sending back everything. We have voted on many things tonight, but this is one that we are saying send it back. And the word "subtle" comes to mind. Satan was described as very subtle. And I think what is happening here is subtlety, and we have to be very careful with that. The church is built upon the laity and when the laity speaks, we have to listen. I'm sensing and observing a trend that it's as if whatever is said from the platform or whatever is said from the committee or whoever decided it is the right thing. And I'm very cautious about that sort of approach that we've taken. The laity is here to protect the Church, the laity is here to help the Church to become better. So, I'm very, very cautious, I'm observing, listening, watching and I'm noticing that some things that are brought as motions are not being seconded or asked to be seconded, and whatever is in favor of the committee kind of leans toward that motion. So, I would like to beg us and to take note of what the gentleman said and ask this committee to refer it. It will also send a very strong message that the laity has strength, they are strong, and this is the Church in Session. That's the power of it. The Church is in session. So that's a good point to speak about and may everything go fine as we move forward. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. We have heard your comments, and now we have from Spanish Zoom, Armando Enrique Marriaga from the Caribbean Colombian Conference. Go ahead, Armando. We need a translator? Go ahead. You can speak.

ARMANDO E MARRIAGA: Good evening. What I want to express or propose is the following. I think in some churches the wording in this manner when an elder is being nominated or elected is because they're qualified to be ordained. We are so clear that an elder does not require more than one ordination that we have to respect to not lose it. It is clear that when a person has been ordained as an elder, they can work and can serve as a deacon without having to be ordained. This is missing from the

paper and for some churches of our conference it is not clear. We do have to be careful not to awaken something that has already been solved in the past in regards to women, it's not discrimination. They have their place in church, that they do wonderfully. So, I believe that this part needs to be reconsidered a little bit. Thank you very much.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments. Let us hear Sandra Colon from Central California Conference.

SANDRA COLON: Hello. I would like to speak against sending this back. The reason why is because the reason stated for sending it back held with it very particular theological beliefs that I don't believe we as a church have voted that we all agree on. Therefore, if that is the reason that we are to send it back, if we are saying we are going to consider that belief, then we are then condemning the freedom of conscience from many other believers within the church that do not believe that particular point of view. We know that it was voted not to ordain women in ministry in the Session. I myself have been commissioned to be a pastor, which is in accordance with what we believe, but before that vote was taken it was already agreed that areas could decide on whether ordaining their women in positions of Church leadership or not depends upon their conscience. Given that, *The Great Controversy* has a whole chapter on the freedom of conscience. It's very important that we as a people do not force conscience on other members of our denomination. So, we need to think carefully about our decisions regarding sending this back and what message that sends. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments. We have many people to speak. I will give time to all of you, I think. Now I want to ask Mandla Se-Bantwini Sibulete Lupondwana of the Southern Africa Union Conference.

MANDLA SE-BANTWINI SIBULETE LUPONDWANA: Thank you, Chair. I would like to speak against referring it back to the committee. The Church has already taken a policy decision through the Executive Committee of the General Conference to have ordination for all elders, male and female. That was a

1984 decision. It has already been implemented. The nature of the decision is such that people who don't want to have female elders just don't elect them, and those who do go ahead and elect them. And so this amendment that is being proposed allows for those people who do want to have women as elders to elect them and ordain them. For those people who feel that the General Conference in Session has to vote to have women ordained as elders, I think this is a perfect opportunity for them to vote this amendment down. But at the moment the amendment is voted up, then we proceed, and it becomes a General Conference Session decision that ordination of elders will be granted regardless of gender because that's existing Church policy. I would also go further to say the use of the word deaconate is welcome and I'm hoping that at the later stage when we deal with the amendments to the section on deaconesses, we might use this word because it might be helpful going forward. Thank you, Chair.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments. Let's move to Victor Marley.

VICTOR MARLEY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Very wise words from my colleague from Southern Africa. Let me just add to that as this policy is very clear on the Church and how we do this and how we think of the different genders in different roles. Policy, for example, in 60-05 says that the Church rejects every system or philosophy that discriminates against anyone on the basis of race, color, or gender. It continues, "This philosophy and its resulting course of action has made the Church multiracial, multiethnic, and gender inclusive." So, as I see it, Mr. Chairman, the proposal that is on the floor now is simply bringing the *Church Manual* into harmony with the basic principles of the Church as expressed in *GC Working Policy*. So, you know, let's be kind to one another, let's be generous, and let's not put the Church in a position where many areas of mission would actually be devastated if the intention of this proposed tabling came to fruition. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments. It's not tabling. The motion on the table is to refer back to committee. I want to hear Pastor Mario Veloso.

MARIO VELOSO: Thank you, Chairman. I speak in favor of the motion to refer because the amendment is including the subject tacitly, which is not in the agenda. If we vote on this, we are already allowing what is not in the agenda, neither in the *Church Manual*. If we want to discuss the item of ordaining women elders, why don't we put it in a future agenda and discuss it plainly, freely, and healthfully to be able to work together. This Church is one, one Church. And we are acting as if we were two churches. Let's come together, fearing God, look in the Scriptures, and come to a final conclusion to put everything in order for God to bless the preaching of the gospel. If we want to do something to fulfill the mission, let's work everything together as one.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments, Pastor Veloso. Steinunn Hulda Theodors, Iceland Conference.

STEINUNN HULDA THEODORS: Thank you. I just want to thank those who have spoken before me. I agree with Victor Marley that if this is sent back, and we change anything about women as elders ordained, then the Church is in danger. And in my country, we will not exist. This is the biggest thing for the Church in Iceland. And it's hard to even do mission because there's not equality in our Church, and that's sad. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. Now we can hear Mario Alvarado.

MARIO ALVARADO: The original motion is clear and I'm against referring it back. I see no problem with its wording. This is about facilitating mission, right? If this is really about facilitating mission like it was spoken in the morning, then we should allow the local churches to recognize who the Holy Spirit chooses. It doesn't sound like an imposition, rather, a flexibility to let the Spirit lead where it is needed within its context. I can't know how exactly the Spirit is working in other places and stopping that means we go against the work of the Spirit since we put limitations to allow Him to choose who He wants and allow each local church to acknowledge the elders that are to serve the mission of the Church. Talking about it later, tabling what the Spirit can and cannot do right now, should not be left to

later. I think the Spirit has been patient enough. The wording is good and it's only a miniature step forward to allowing the Spirit to work out His mission. Let the local church acknowledge who the Holy Spirit acknowledges as an elder.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments. I want to hear Martin E Altink who has a point of order.

MARTIN E ALTINK: Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a point of order because many of the speakers I believe are not speaking to the motion, as far as I understand, the motion was not intended to speak about female ordination in any kind.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: We are speaking about the referral, the referral of the item to the committee.

MARTIN E ALTINK: Exactly. And we are not speaking about the ordination of females. So that's my point of order.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Yes. We are speaking about that issue, about the referral of the item to the committee. And it is what I am hearing from the comments. Thank you. Let's move ahead with James M Howard.

JAMES M HOWARD: Yes. Thank you, Brother Chair. My comment is in favor of referring back to the committee, and it's because the stated purpose was to remove some confusion. And I feel that there's a little bit of confusion added. And here's my reason. If you look at the deacons' section of the *Church Manual*, it has a section that deacons must be ordained. Then it says newly elected deacons cannot fill their office until they have been ordained. In the deaconess section it does not have any such statement. What it has is an allowance for ordination. So, as I understand the *Church Manual*—and this could be addressed if it needs to be, but as it currently stands —deacons must be ordained in order to serve in office, and deaconesses may be ordained but it is not a necessary qualification for them to serve. So, in the statement that we're considering—and you could put it back on the screen—it says that

deaconesses (half of the deaconate) would not need to be ordained essentially because they've already been ordained as elders. But that doesn't make sense if they've never needed to be ordained in the first place. That's not a qualification for deaconesses. So, it seems that the statement is somewhat unnecessary. The first part of it I think is fine. It just says that if an elder is nominated to office or elected to office, then that authorizes their ordination. But the last part of it that brings in the gender part, and specifically the deaconesses, actually changes or adapts the policy to make it required for deaconesses to be ordained and I believe there are many areas of the world Church that are not practicing that, many local churches are not practicing that; so I think it creates some confusion in that way. Right now, deacons are required to be ordained, deaconesses may be ordained, and this statement seems to almost act like it's required of both. And that's why I think it's important for the committee to take another look. Thank you, Brother Chair.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. Your comment is clear. I think we can move now with Robert Csaba Csizmadia from Danish Union of Churches Conference.

ROBERT CSABA CSIZMADIA: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to speak as a conference president. In some of our churches the mission is carried out by female elders. I believe that raising this issue is seriously impacting our way of doing mission and our way of being successful in mission. I'm really saddened but it seems that today, issues are raised that are kind of canceling out our history, kind of trying to cancel out the road that God led us in fulfilling His mission. I'm very happy about the comment about the freedom that was and is given to us in every local church, and I'm very happy about that. Please, help us also to do the mission. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. Now Qedumusa Mathonsi from Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

QEDUMUSA MATHONSI: Thank you, Elder Chair. I want to speak for the referral back to the committee. First of all, because the issue of ordination of elders has not been settled according to the

comments of those who came before me, and that's why, if you look at the section about deaconesses, it's very tentative as to be accommodative of an issue that has not yet been finalized and settled. I am concerned because it looks like we are moving in incremental and subtle stages around an issue that we have not settled. I want to give an example. If you come to a border and they say, okay, you are not allowed to import 100 five-liter bottles of cooking oil or cooking oil is not allowed into this border, and then you say, okay, let me not use a truck. Let me distribute the five-liter bottles amongst all the people on the bus so I can get all the hundred bottles into the border. And that's what I'm seeing, that we are little by little dealing with an issue that we thought was not yet settled. That's my concern.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comment. Let's move ahead with Michael Nixon, mic number 7.

MICHAEL NIXON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to read something from the book of I Peter, Chapter 2, starting with verse 4. It reads, "As you come to Him," meaning Jesus, "a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus." I'm speaking against the referral back of the document. I believe that women are part of that holy priesthood. And I think that at the core of this discussion, if I had to give my opinion, as I'm new to these kinds of settings and documents and the right verbiage of things, is that I trust the Spirit of God. And I think the question for us is whether or not we trust the Spirit of God's leading in whoever the Spirit of God decides to move through. And if in a local church body that includes a woman who serves as an elder, who wakes up early and stays late to make sure that that church continues to run, oftentimes without recognition from us men, then I believe the least we can do is allow the Spirit to do what it decides to do through that woman.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comments. We have Jonas Arrais, and I will ask to stop accepting more people. We have 11 people who are ready to speak. Jonas Arrais in mic number 4.

JONAS ARRIAS: Pastor Chairman, I am against sending back this item to the *Church Manual* Committee, number one, because this document is very clear. We are not discussing women's ordination, as some of us maybe are thinking. We are here just suggesting that elders should be ordained. The 1975 GC Spring Meeting voted allowing the divisions to ordain female elders. In 1984 they reaffirmed the vote made in 1975. I believe there is nothing against the Bible on this theological point. If so, why for so many years has this Church been committing this kind of mistake? I believe when we ordain women, it's because the division is authorized to proceed in that direction, with the authorization of the General Conference. For sure it's not in the *Church Manual* because culturally the Church didn't come to a united resolution on this topic. But we need to respect those divisions who are electing female elders. And those who are ordained are okay. If in the future they are elected as local deaconesses, they don't need to be ordained again because the ordination for elder allows the person to perform the work and the ministry of the deaconess. So, I am against this referral to the *Church Manual* Committee. The document is clear. It's not discussing ordination, but it's flexible allowing those divisions who are ordaining to proceed.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you, Jonas. I want to hear Stefan Juliano. Stefan, mic number 2.

STEFAN JULIANO: Mr. Chairman, we have drifted into a very large discussion and I'd like to end that and move to call the previous question.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Okay. If that's voted, then we stop the discussion, and then we can now vote about the referral, a referral of this item back to the committee.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: If you vote "yes," you are referring to this motion to the *Church Manual* Committee. If you say "no," then we continue with our initial proposal.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: The motion to refer this item back to the committee failed, so now we need to return to the original motion. I will ask the secretary for the *Church Manual* Committee to present the motion again.

GERSON SANTOS: Very well, Pastor Chair. The recommendation is on the screen, and it's presented as reference number 409-22. Recommendation is to amend the *Church Manual* on page 73, and this would include the section on Ordination of Elders. "Election to the office of elder does not itself qualify one as an elder. Ordination is required before an elder has the authority to function." When a church in a business meeting votes the election of new elders, it also authorizes their ordination. And on the last paragraph of the document it says, "Once ordained, elders need not be ordained again if reelected, or upon election as elders of other churches, provided they have maintained regular membership status. They are also qualified to the deaconate." I move, Mr. Chair.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: It has been moved, and seconded. Let's hear some people who are ready to speak, and I will give the word to Clinton Wahlen, please. Mic number 7.

CLINTON WAHLEN: Thank you very much, Brother Chair. I would like to say that already we have a policy in the *Church Manual* that permits men and women to serve as church leaders in the local church. So, this doesn't inhibit mission whatsoever. Our *Church Manual* already provides for that. Second, because of the decisions at the 1975 Spring Meeting and the 1984 Annual Council, it is already permitted for divisions to ordain women to the local church eldership. And that is the case, of course, here in North America, where we reside. And I noticed that this request came to us from the Trans-European Division. And I understand how in Europe this may be considered helpful to harmonize with their current practice. But the ordination of female elders or even ordination of deaconesses is not practiced in all parts of the world Church. And this, therefore, if this motion passes, these amendments pass, it could create more confusion, not less. More serious even than that, it would authorize local churches to ordain women as elders who have been elected as local elders even in those divisions that haven't authorized the ordination of women as local elders. So this would actually create a worldwide policy that we do not have currently, and I think we need more discussion. I would recommend that this be voted down so that we could study this worldwide.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: We hear your recommendation. Thank you, Pastor Clinton. And now we have mic number 5, Mark Weir.

MARK WEIR: Mr. Chairman, I would speak in favor of this for several reasons. When I first graduated from Union College in 1983, I traveled to serve in my first church in northern Minnesota, I was surprised to find the number of women elders that were already functioning at that time. This is simply acknowledging what has been the standard practice in many places for many decades. If a church chooses to acknowledge that this is a person who has demonstrated spiritual leadership, regardless of gender, and they say we trust you and your spiritual insights to help us in our church, this language helps us to clarify and make it more understandable. And also this is a subject that's driving many of our young people crazy. Why do we not acknowledge who God has seemingly touched with gifts and ministry. If there are places where people choose not to have a woman serve as an elder, that's their choice. But if there are places where you have both men and women as elders and some are ordained and some are not, what message are we sending? I speak very strongly in favor of this for consistency in acknowledging whom God has called and whom we recognize.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. Next move with Stefan Giuliani, mic number 2.

STEFAN GIULIANI: I'd like to move to call the question.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: It's seconded. Then we need to vote on ending discussion.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. 1,278 votes yes, 166 no. We can now move to the main motion.

TODD MACFARLAND: We are opening item 406, the main motion. This is on whether or not to make the change to the *Church Manual*. So far we voted on whether to refer or not, whether or not to have debate or not, but this is the main motion; so if you're in favor of this, vote "yes," it will be amended, it will be put in the *Church Manual*. If you do not, vote "no" and it will not be. And the ballot is open now, Mr. Chairman.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. Now you can exercise your right and vote in favor or against including this item in the *Church Manual*.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: The motion has carried. Now we can move to the next item.

GERSON SANTOS: Thank you, Pastor Chair. We are moving forward to item 407 in your agenda, which is 409—22, letter B, the second part of this action, and it is in your agenda book on page 60. The rationale of this recommendation is that this change is being recommended in order to keep the text in line with the *Church Manual*, Chapter 8 regarding deacons must be ordained. So, it is recommended to amend the *Church Manual*, Chapter 8, page 80, as follows, “Ordination Service for Deaconess” Such a service, like the ordination of deacons, would be carried out by an ordained pastor currently credentialed by the conference. The ordination service should be characterized by simplicity and performed in the presence of the church.” And the last paragraph, “Elders subsequently elected as deaconesses should not be ordained as deaconesses because ordination as elder covers this office.” I move, Mr. Chair, we accept this recommendation.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: It is moved and seconded. Now is time for comments or questions. We have James Howard in mic number 7.

JAMES HOWARD: Thank you, Brother Chairman. Can you put it back on the screen for us? I just wanted to point out again, the rationale on page 78 is trying to bring in line with the section “Deacons Must be Ordained.” But the added line is not about deacons, it's about deaconesses, and the deaconess section does not have a section that says deaconesses must be ordained. In fact, it says if they have an ordination service, such a service would be. So, it doesn't require that service. I'm still trying to figure out why we're using the deacon section to bring it into harmony rather than the deaconess section which it doesn't need to be brought into harmony? So, anyway, if we want to make a change to bring it into harmony, then there are other things that would need to happen. Right now, this is actually doing

something different from what the current policy is, which is to say deaconesses may be ordained. But the current policy does not require that deaconesses be ordained. Am I mistaken about that, Gerson?

GERSON SANTOS: Well, the recommendation, as it is stated here, you're correct in the context. It is describing the ordination service. The recommendation is to add two lines at the end of this section, understanding that we took the previous vote on "Elders subsequently elected as deaconesses should not be ordained as deaconesses because ordination as elder covers this office." So, we are considering this recommendation because we voted the previous one.

JAMES HOWARD: Okay, but does that mean that deaconesses now must be ordained? I'm just confused, it doesn't seem consistent.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: I think you have had the opportunity to express your point.

JAMES HOWARD: Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. Let's move to mic number 2. Jeroen Tuinstra.

JEROEN TUINSTRA: Mr. Chair, I would like to express a small concern, but maybe it's big, this additional line here reflects a certain theology and that is that we slowly create a certain hierarchy of ordination whereby the ordination of an elder is above the ordination of a deacon and meaning that a deacon, someone being ordained as an elder doesn't have to be ordained again to fill the office of deacon, but the other way around we do require that. So, the ordination of a deacon would have to be reordained if that person becomes an elder. In that way we create a hierarchy of ordination which I believe is not necessarily biblical. So, I would like to request that we send this back to the committee and to either come back with a biblical rationale for the hierarchy or to come back with words added to it, something like "vice versa," meaning that deaconesses that have been ordained and later get elected to be elders, that they don't have to be reordained either, and that would make them a similar ordination. It's the same spirit that is ordaining these people. So, I would like to move it to go back to the committee and to either come back with a biblical rationale for this hierarchy of ordination or to

come back with a wording that it can go the other way around too. A deacon or deaconess becoming an elder doesn't have to be reordained, either.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Okay, our brother is asking to send it back to the committee. Is there a second? Seconded. Then we need to discuss that motion, to send that item back to the committee, *Church Manual* Committee. Are there any comments about this motion? Anthony Bosman, mic number 7.

ANTHONY BOSMAN: Mr. Chairman, my brother raises an excellent point. This does reinforce a hierarchy, and that concerns me. But that hierarchy already exists. Male elders do not need to be ordained when they become male deacons. So, this proposal is just creating parallelism between women and men. And so, I say we reject this motion. We go ahead, we accept the change, but then as a church body we continue to study and reflect upon how we created a hierarchy and how can we move away from that to a more biblical understanding. So, I speak against the call to move it back to committee.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you for your comment. Now Mandla Se—Bantwini from Southern Africa Union Conference, mic number 5.

MANDLA SE-BANTWINI LUPONDWANA: Thank you, Chair. I speak against the motion to refer it back to the committee. Elder Hensley Mooroooven made a very good illustration when he spoke about the two sides of the coin: mission and organization. Currently, we set people aside for three offices in the Church through ordination: deacons, elders, and pastors. Then, organizationally, the Church, through policy, gives different functions to these offices which are not listed in the Bible. The Bible doesn't prescribe who chairs a board meeting or a business meeting. That is handled by policy, and so we currently practice this. And so, to refer it back simply, because we have not fine-tuned the details of what we're doing, is going to hamper the organizational side. If we would like to engage in a study that is going to look at whether it is appropriate to set people aside for a particular office, and then on the

other hand, have a policy that gives them certain responsibilities and authority, we can have that as a separate discussion. But this amendment does not introduce something new, both in the practice of the Church and in the functioning of the different offices. So, I speak against the motion to refer it back. Let us go ahead because this amendment is in line with the previous amendment. Thank you, Chair.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. I don't see anyone else. I think we can vote on this.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you, the motion failed, so we go back to the main motion. And I want to give the opportunity to speak to Victor Marley in mic number 5.

VICTOR MARLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to support the motion mainly because of pragmatic reasons. I think it provides harmony, but I do want to just share an observation. A general observation that I think that we need to reflect upon. It's not something we'll solve today, but I want to mention it nevertheless. In her book, Acts of the Apostles, Ellen White writes about the ordination of Paul and Barnabas as they are sent from Antioch on their missionary journey. It was an ordination to an office or specific task for a specific time. She uses the word ordination to refer to nothing more than that, a specific task for a specific time. This is just one example. Ordination is limited in this sense, but the way we use the term is a once in a lifetime status that covers multiple roles. At some stage, we need to look at our Theology of Ordination, the whole concept. We're not going to do that now. So, I do support the motion, but I think that if we could come to a place where we use the word "ordination" as Ellen White does, that would solve multiple issues for us.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: And now we have Goodluck Alozie in the Imo Conference with West-Central Africa Division. Please Brother Goodluck.

GOODLUCK ALOZIE: I want to speak in the area of hierarchy of ordination. If somebody is ordained once as a deacon and doesn't come over to the office of an elder, and it does not carry ordination, then because we want to avoid hierarchy of ordination, then it means that if somebody who is ordained a deacon, can also assume the office of the pastor or minister when the person is called into

the ministry, without ordination. Is that what you are saying? When somebody is in that office and moves to another office, the person receives ordination, the same as when someone is called into the ministry. The person receives an ordination into the ministry. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thanks for your comment. Let's move on with Robert Csizmadia from Duna Conference, mic number 2.

ROBERT CSIZMADIA: Dear Mr. Chair, because more than 80 percent of divisions have already settled this issue and because the blessed Scriptures call Phoebe a deacon, I would like to call the question.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you. He's calling the question then, which means we are closing the discussion without further discussion. It is seconded, so we need to vote on the motion.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: The motion has carried so we are ready to vote on the main motion.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: The motion has carried to amend the *Church Manual*. Thank you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: We will now ask the Chairman and Secretary of the Nominating Committee to come and present their first partial report.

LOWELL COOPER: Thank you, Brother Chairman, and good evening, Delegates. I wish to bring you information from the Nominating Committee. We've been at work for several hours. My name is Lowell Cooper. I've been asked to serve as Chairman of the Nominating Committee. I want to introduce to you the other individuals who have been tasked with responsibilities in the Nominating Committee. We have vice chair, Robert Folkenberg, Jr., secretary of the Nominating Committee is Magdiel Perez Schultz. I'm sure that you are well acquainted with him already. And the associate secretary for the Nominating Committee is Cheryl Shavers. Thank you.

The Nominating Committee has a report to bring tonight, but I think it would only be appropriate that I explain a little bit about our use of time. We've been together for several hours, and it took us a while to get organized, to understand protocols in our work, to make sure that ElectionBuddy

was working, to make sure that our Zoom participants were able to interrelate with us throughout the conversations. We then took some time to get acquainted with parliamentary procedures. In a group that has several different languages and cultures, and the necessity of translators, et cetera, even parliamentary procedures can be very difficult things. It can be difficult for us in English, and when you try to translate the impact and so forth of parliamentary procedures, it can take time.

So, we've had some time in working ourselves into a team tonight, and when we understood our procedures, we had an opportunity to discuss several names as potential candidates for the position of the General Conference President. The Nominating Committee feels that God has blessed our church with leaders. After discussion, we voted, and the Nominating Committee has a recommendation to bring for your consideration tonight on a vote on one name that we took. I'll call the secretary, Pastor Magdiel Perez Schultz, to come and share that report and recommendation with you.

MAGDIEL PEREZ SCHULTZ: The report #1 from the Nominating Committee that is going to be presented to you is that we present to you the name of the incumbent, Pastor Ted Wilson, as the next president of the General Conference. I move it, Pastor Chair.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: It's moved. I can see the second in the applause. Strong second. Then, I think we need to proceed to the vote.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: We have a new president, Pastor Ted Wilson.

LOWELL COOPER: Thank you Brother Chair, we're grateful that the body has received and accepted the report of the Nominating Committee, and suggest the Chair invite Elder Wilson and his wife to the platform.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Yes, we invite Pastor Wilson to come and speak to us. Pastor Wilson.

TED C WILSON: Thank you, Brother Chair, and thank you Nominating Committee officers for your comments and introduction. It is indeed a very humbling experience to be requested to assist and guide God's last-day remnant Church. It is not something that a human being can do on his own. It is

only through the power of the Holy Spirit, and I'm very grateful that we started our morning and our session today with a very special emphasis on prayer and on the Holy Spirit. It is within that context that Nancy and I agree to continue to work in this area and position, in cooperation with all of you. For its only in total member involvement—church members, church officers, pastors—uniting and working together as the Spirit of Prophecy has indicated, that God's work will be finished. As the Holy Spirit infuses His power into our church members and our pastors, unitedly working, God can do wonders. As our marvelous theme says, “Jesus is coming. Get involved.” That's Total Member Involvement. Jesus Himself, in calling Simon Peter and Andrew, said in Matthew Chapter 4 and Verse 19, “And he saith unto them, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” What a privilege it is for us, to unitedly proclaim Christ's Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14 and the Fourth Angel of Revelation 18, calling people through the power of the Holy Spirit back to the true worship of God. Being fishers of men and women, united in our outreach, being revived, reformed, humbled all through the power of the Holy Spirit. I pledge myself, and I ask that you pledge along with me, and with Nancy, that we will unitedly proclaim this amazing Advent message, to get involved, because Jesus is coming soon. Thank you, and God bless each one of you.

ABNER DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you, pastor. I want to ask the chairman of the Nominating Committee to pray for Pastor Wilson and also to close the meeting this evening.

[Prayer by Lowell Cooper]