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California: Adventist Women to Receive Same Ministerial Credentials as Men

Riverside, California, USA. Seventh-day Adventist Church administrators in the Southeastern California area voted on March 16 to issue male and female pastors in their district with the same ministerial credentials. The decision by the executive committee of the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SECC) is believed to be a first for the Adventist Church, which generally operates a two-tier credentialing system for men and women.

"Treating women ministers without discrimination in our conference has been a long-standing goal," said F. Lynn Mallery, SECC president. "The document was adopted without one dissenting vote." Women make up nearly 10 percent of pastors in the 60,000-member conference, which serves five counties south and east of Los Angeles.

The new credential states that the individual is an "ordained-commissioned" minister in good standing. Adventist ministers receive the credential after successfully completing appropriate theological education, hands-on ministry in a local congregation that shows their gift for ministry, and an oral review and examination. They are also "set aside" for ministry in a public ceremony that includes prayer and the laying on of hands.

"This procedure could show the way for the rest of the [Adventist Church in North America] on how to handle this matter with equality and yet abide by the spirit and letter of Church policy," said Thomas Mostert, president of the Adventist Church

in the Pacific Union region-a Church administrative district that includes the SECC.

Mallery stated that, "We support the ongoing mission of the 11-million member Church of which we are a part. We respect the variety of views that members elsewhere have on this subject. We hope that our fellow believers will also respect our moral conviction that men and women in this conference who are equally qualified and have had fruitful ministries should be treated in the same way."

Currently, the Adventist Church at large chooses to recognize males who are set aside for gospel ministry as being "ordained," while females are designated as "commissioned." In comparison with ordained ministers, commissioned ministers are barred from performing three functions: they may not organize churches; they cannot ordain elders and deacons; and they are not eligible to serve as a conference president. SECC accepts women pastors who have met the same requirements as men to be fully qualified and authorized within its borders.