

I Have a Dream

Written by Ardis Stenbakken

(This is really not a sermon, but a keynote address. It can be used for congresses, conventions, or women's training, or any time one is presenting what Women's Ministries is all about. It is presented here in the style of presentation notes that Ardis normally uses.)

In August of 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King
delivered a famous speech
before a vast audience in Washington, D.C.
—an audience of people who had suffered,
who did not have equal rights.
He was the famous African-American civil rights leader.
In the speech he said,
“I have a dream....”

He had a dream that his children would be judged
by their character
and not the color of their skin,
dreams and hopes for the future,
qualities that he was willing to work for,
and ultimately die for.

I too have a dream.
I have a dream for the women of this church.
A dream for each of you.

To dream is a good thing.
God has often spoken to His people through dreams.

But some people day-dream.
Most day dreaming is done lying down.
These dreamers dream about
riches and power,
money and privilege.
The person does nothing and nothing happens.

A vision without a task is a dream;
A task without a vision is drudgery.
The two must be combined for success.

But I have a dream,
a dream for you and me,
one that I am willing to work for,
to live for.
And this dream can happen when women are empowered to serve.
It is not a day dream.
It can happen
because it can be through the One
Who gives dreams and visions
and Who makes them come to pass.
The One who truly empowers us.

The early church too had dreams.
They had dreams because God had given them a task to do,
a vision of what could be.
They were to take the gospel to the whole world.
They were to turn the world upside down.

In Acts 2:17-21 Peter gives the Old Testament basis for this dream.
Men and women, young and old,
would dream dreams and prophesy.
And that is the basis for my dream as well.

¹⁷*In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

¹⁸*Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

I have a dream.

It is a dream that pictures
every woman in the church becoming empowered,
especially the women who are willing to accept leadership.
It pictures a strong Women's Ministries department in every church.
with a Women's Ministries leader elected by every church
and sitting on every church board,
representing the women of every church.

So my dream depends on you!

I have a dream of every woman finding
and using her spiritual gifts.
Growing strong spiritually herself
And helping others grow spiritually.

I have a dream of women becoming involved
in serious Bible study.
That she may know for herself
what God really says about women's roles.
That she will be able to share this biblical understanding
of scripture from the woman's point of view
with those around her.
This is where empowerment to serve must come from

I dream of women's Bible study groups in every church.
And women's prayer groups in every church.
From these will flow ministry groups of all types.
Women's Ministries is not Women's Club
Or Women's Society.
It is Women's *Ministries*,
meeting the many and varied spiritual,
emotional and material needs of women.

Furthermore, I have a dream
that every one of our daughters,
grand-daughters,
nieces,
every young woman in our church

will know her value before Christ.
She will understand from scripture
that she has as much value
as any boy,
any man.
That she is valued by her church.

We must empower our young women to say no to pre-marital sex.
That she does not have to sell or give her body
to any one,
in any way. to be accepted.

That she does not deserve to be abused.
Ever.
In any way.
She will feel so good
about what Jesus Christ has done for and through her
that the things the world offers for value
and self esteem
will have no attraction for her.

We must speak out against Female Genital Mutilation;
We must also speak out against pornography;
We must speak out and act against prostitution;
We must speak out and act against human trafficking,
Or any other type of exploitation of women for any purpose.

It is my dream that every woman
who has been hurt, abused, used,
will find healing in Jesus Christ.
And that she will find complete acceptance
in the Adventist church.

I think of Mary Magdalene
from whom seven devils were cast out.
She was totally accepted by Jesus Christ
and was part of his inner circle of disciples
according to Luke 8.

I think too of the woman caught in adultery—

“neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more,” Jesus said.

I have a dream.

That every man,
every woman,
every child,
will know that they can be safe from abuse
in their Adventist Christian home,
and in the church,
the church school,
or any of the activities associated with them.

I know there will be no abuse in heaven.
So I dream of the day when as Christians we will stop abuse.

The first step is to admit it happens.

We must teach our boys and girls a better way
To deal with anger and power.
We will talk about stopping abuse,
educating to make it stop.
Our church must be a safe place.

It is my dream too

that it will be a place where people outside
our church can come
and know they will be helped
and they will be safe.

I dream of a church where every woman has an opportunity
of an education

In Women’s Ministries we have a scholarship program,
but it is limited.

We must find ways to increase the number of scholarships
And opportunities for our women who also
Dream the impossible dreams.

I encourage you to find out about our SOS program—

Scholarshiping Our Sisters
and becoming involved—you *can* make a difference.

I have a dream

that every woman in our church
will have the opportunity to learn to read.
So she can read her Bible.
She can read the Sabbath school lesson to her children
or grand-children.
She can read the directions on a medicine bottle,
fill out a job application,
take church leadership.
Further, that we will extend this ability
to every man,
woman,
and child in our community.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if our Adventist churches
would become known as the place you could go
if you want to learn how to read and write?
Where people care about you and will teach you?
Where you can learn to read the Bible?

I dream of using literacy and second language training
to take the gospel
to those who don’t know Jesus,
planting new churches as we go.

It is my dream that someday soon
our colleges and seminaries will teach our teachers,
our pastors
and even pastors’ wives
how to do literacy tutoring
so that they can use it for outreach.

I have a dream.

A dream that every woman in our church
will have access to basic women’s health information.
That every woman will know the facts about HIV/AIDS
How to prevent it—
Even if she is married
and her husband may be exposed to AIDS;
How to care for those who have it;

How to educate others regarding it;
And yes, how to financially and physically
care for the children AIDS infected parents leave
behind, many of whom have AIDS as well.

That every woman will know
how to do self-breast exams,
have current helpful information about reproductive health and
how to care for her body.

If the woman is married,
I dream that she will have training
in how to care for her husband and children
through good nutrition,
through healthful vegetarian cooking,
and clean and hygienic house keeping.

I have a dream.
A dream of homes in which the husband and wife
both encourage each other
to use his/her spiritual gifts

And both encourage the children
To dream big dreams
of expanded and imaginative service;
both encourage girls
to be prepared for the world that awaits them
both encourage boys
to be fully prepared to appreciate their softer-
side feelings and emotions

I dream of a church in which men are fully comfortable
with their manhood,
men who do not feel women are a threat or competition

A world in which women show appreciation
to husbands
sons
fathers

for all they do to make our world safe and comfortable

And for their past leadership of the church.
and to encourage them to continue to serve the Lord
as their spiritual gifts direct.

I dream of a church where men and women can serve together,
forgetting gender,
only assessing ability.

All submitting and encouraging as we read in Ephesians 5:21.

I have a dream.
A very possible dream,
that every woman will have an active mentor.
A mentor who will help her reach her full potential
personally,
spiritually,
professionally.

Age is no barrier
—anyone can mentor
and all of us can benefit from mentoring.
I know I do.

We have hundreds and thousands of young women
who are raising our next generation of church members.

My dream is that if they want to
they can stay and home
and care for these children
and feel totally blessed
and fulfilled.

Or if she chooses to work outside the home,
that the church will help her in whatever way possible,
and help with her children.

It is especially my dream
that as a church we help and support our single mothers who
struggle to raise her children in the Lord.

I have a dream.
That every woman may have the opportunity

to support her family economically.
That she can learn the principles
of time and money management
so she can support her church as well.

And yes, I dream that single women too can feel fulfilled
and can take their places in church leadership and activities.
That they can feel like whole persons regardless of
marital status.
That these single women will be valued for their personhood.

I have a dream.
A dream of Women's Ministries meeting very real needs
in a very real world.
A world where women can make a very real difference.

Women's Ministries is not a department
just for the sake of having another department,
of giving someone another job to do.
Women's Ministries is to make a difference for women,
to help them realize their dreams.
So again, you are necessary to the fulfillment of my dream.
You, empowered to serve, will make the difference.

Joel and Peter say
that it is a sign of the last days when
men and women,
old and young,
dream dreams
and see visions
and go out to the world to prophesy,
to share with the world the good news
that Jesus is coming soon.

I have a dream—
it *was* a dream
it is now becoming a reality
of women doing public evangelism.

It is happening all over these divisions.
We must each become involved and support them.

I have a dream of Women's Ministries,
Women empowered to serve,
reaching out in their communities
through a variety of programs
Building friendships
Breaking down prejudice
Reaching out to Muslim brothers and sisters
Reaching out to other Christians
Reaching Buddhist brothers and sisters
Hindu brothers and sisters
Animist brothers and sisters
Helping them to know the real Jesus.

I dream of reaching the upper classes of society.
Ellen White says women are especially suited for this
Going into homes, studying and praying.

If we leave here with the same ideas we came with
The same fears
The same inadequacies,
This congress (convention/training) will be a failure

But if we can dream new dreams,
See new possibilities
Gain new strengths from our sisters and brothers
Find new empowerment to serve,
Learn new skills
Learn new methods
Learn new ideas
We can go home empowered to serve
to help our sisters,
the other 9+ million Adventist women
dream new dreams too,
to feel new hope
to empower them also to dream and to serve,

then this gathering will truly be blessed by God.

Because we are members of a church
A religious community,
And not a government or Non-Governmental Organization,
We must act in total trust and cooperation with the Holy Spirit.
We must act in the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

We must each have a personal relationship with a God
Who really cares for His daughters.
This will be the basis for our dreams

Our visions,

Our reaching out to our sisters in the church
And in our communities.

I have a dream.
Won't you please dream with me?
And then let's together make our dreams come true.

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About the Sermon Writer: Ardis Dick Stenbakken edits the submissions to the General Conference Women's Ministries devotional book. She and her husband, Dick, a retired Army chaplain, have two married adult children and one granddaughter. Ardis especially enjoys helping women discover their full potential in the Lord. She has retired and moved to Colorado.