

a voice for women in baptist life

# Vocare

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BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY  
*advocating • connecting • networking*

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## BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY HIRES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**PAMELA R. DURSO** of Atlanta, Georgia is the new full-time executive director for Baptist Women in Ministry. Durso, who was associate executive director-treasurer of the Baptist History and Heritage Society, began her new role with BWIM on July 1.

"We believe that Pam Durso has the proven ability to continue BWIM's mission in new and exciting ways," said Robin Anderson, past coordinator of BWIM's leadership team. "This is a kairos moment for BWIM and we feel strongly the leadership of God in this process."

LeAnn Gunter Johns, who served for four years on the leadership team, said, "Pam brings with her a wide array of knowledge and experience, in addition to her own personal call to advocate, connect, and network women clergy. Her experience as a volunteer on the leadership team will assist her in serving as a visionary for our organization."

"Being asked to serve as BWIM executive director is both an honor and a privilege," said Durso. "BWIM has a history of serving both individuals and congregations for over twenty-six years, and I am glad to be a part of that rich history."

Since receiving her Ph.D. in church history from Baylor University in 1992, Durso has been a strong supporter of clergywomen, from compiling and co-editing the *State of Women in Baptist Life*, an annual publication of BWIM, to serving four years on BWIM's leadership team, to writing and editing numerous articles and books on women. Her books include *The Power of Women: The Life and Writings of Sarah Moore Grimke* and *Courage and Hope: The Stories of Ten Baptist Women Ministers*, which she co-edited with her husband, Keith. They have two children, Michael, 15, and Alexandra, 12.

## OUR VISION

Baptist Women in Ministry will be a catalyst in Baptist life, drawing together women and men, in partnership with God, to illuminate, advocate, and nurture the gifts and graces of women.

Robin Anderson is past coordinator of Baptist Women in Ministry and is associate pastor of education and outreach at University Baptist Church, Baltimore, Maryland.



# MOVING FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE

BY ROBIN ANDERSON

In 2003, the board and faithful supporters of Baptist Women in Ministry recognized that the organization needed a new sense of direction in order to carry out its mission more effectively. They created a transition team of visionary women who worked diligently for two years, listening to the needs of their constituents and creating a plan of for BWIM to meet those needs. In 2005, BWIM began implementing that vision. Four purposes (networking, connecting, advocating, and funding) were set forth that would guide all decisions the organization made, and BWIM moved from a board of directors structure to that of a leadership team.

Creating a leadership team that was guided by a newly focused vision paved the way for BWIM to birth strong new initiatives. For three successive years (2006-2008), the organization produced *The State of Women in Baptist Life* reports. Beginning in 2007, BWIM invited Baptist churches to participate in the Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Women's Preaching by asking churches to invite a woman to preach during the month of February. In 2009, 110 churches participated. In 2008, BWIM sponsored two informative workshops at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's General Assembly, and in 2009, BWIM led a panel discussion titled "Won't You Be My Neighbor? Women Ministers as Friends, Sisters, Wives and Mothers." In 2010,

Smyth and Helwys Publishing, Inc. in partnership with BWIM will release *This Is What A Preacher Looks Like*, a book of sermons by Baptist women.

Over the past several years, BWIM's leadership team has discovered exactly how much potential this organization has to connect, network, and advocate for Baptist women in ministry. Given the recent successes, this spring the leadership team determined that BWIM is now organized and focused in a way that makes possible for new dreams, yet we realized that we could accomplish our goals more quickly if we had a full-time leader instead of relying solely on volunteers to coordinate our efforts. Thanks to the diligence of Reba Cobb, our funding leader, BWIM is now in the position to fund an executive director who will guide and support our leadership team. Pam Durso's experience, knowledge, and passion for advocating for women in ministry make her the perfect choice for this position.

We celebrate that just six years after questioning if BWIM would be able to continue, the organization is so active that we would need a full-time leader to keep us moving forward. Pam's excellent leadership, as well as that of our leadership team, will make it possible for BWIM to continue and increase our efforts to connect, network, and advocate for Baptist women serving God in ministry.

## MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

To receive the BWIM's monthly e-Newsletter, e-mail Pam Durso at [pamdurso@bwim.info](mailto:pamdurso@bwim.info). Include E-Newsletter in your subject line.

## ORDINATION AND NEW POSITION INFORMATION

Please send information about ordinations and new ministry positions to Pam Durso at [pamdurso@bwim.info](mailto:pamdurso@bwim.info). This information will be included in the monthly E-Newsletter. For the ordinations, please include woman's name; date of ordination; ordaining church name, city, and state; and woman's current ministry position.



# TELLING STORIES

BY PAM DURSO



Maybe the headline should have read: “Baptist Women in Ministry Hires a Baptist Historian.” My education, training, and experience have all been in the area of history, and for the past six years, my work has been almost exclusively in the area of Baptist history. And I will be honest . . . history, including Baptist history, has a pretty sad reputation. Words like energy, passion, and enthusiasm are not often used to describe my chosen discipline.

But for me, my professional career as a historian has been anything but boring. For the past ten years, I have sought to live out my calling to ministry and my interest in Baptist history by being a storyteller, as one who collects stories and then shares them with others. A good many of those stories belong to Baptist women ministers. In the last few years, I have been blessed to meet hundreds of Baptist women who have or are serving in ministry positions. After hearing their stories, I began sharing those stories in articles, sermons, and presentations, and finally in a book, *Courage and Hope: The Stories of Ten Baptist Women Ministers*, which I co-edited with my husband.

Storytelling has become a way of life for me—both professionally and personally. I am intrigued by how we introduce ourselves to others and share our personal histories with them. I love to hear the stories of others, because the sharing of story is the sharing of life. And I love to tell my story to others, because telling it helps me define who I am, remember where I have been, and dream of who I am becoming. Over the years I have developed a very strong commitment to

hearing, preserving, and telling stories.

In the spring as conversations about my working for BWIM unfolded, I dreamed of the ways in which I could use my gifts and calling. I thought of all the new stories that I would hear and new friends with whom I could share my story. In the midst of all that dreaming and thinking, it occurred to me that I had forgotten one little detail—actually, this forgotten detail is huge, and when I realized what I had neglected, I was both embarrassed and driven to correct the oversight.

My memory lapse was that I had forgotten to tell my story to my daughter Alex. Oh sure, she has heard my stories for twelve years now (although how much she actually listens is debatable). She knows about my faith commitment. She knows what I believe about hundreds of topics, but I had never told her the story of my calling, and I had never shared with her about why this new work with BWIM is so significant to me.

So I made a plan. I invited Alex to lunch and asked if she would go shopping with me to buy new furniture for the BWIM office. She gave me one of her wonderful almost-teenager-skeptical looks (the one that means—well, that sounds like a lame invitation), and then she asked, “Who else is going?” And I said, “Just you and me,” and she actually smiled. So on a hot July morning, we set off, and by the end of the day we had spent hours in IKEA, visited three office stores, and looked through four furniture shops.

The best part of the day, however, was in the car, driving from place to place, and in those moments, I shared with Alex more of my faith journey. I told her the story of my own sense of calling to ministry when I was her age—twelve years old. I told her of my confusion. I did not know a woman minister, did not know if women could be ministers, and wondered if perhaps I was crazy to think God wanted me to do something—somewhere.

I told Alex about my college experiences that confirmed my sense of calling, my journey through seminary and graduate school, my first teaching position, and my work as a Baptist historian. And then I told her about my new sense of calling. I told her about BWIM, its mission, and its commitments, and about my excitement in undertaking this new role. Near the end of our shopping adventure, I told Alex that I very much wanted her to know my story and to know why I am serving with BWIM because I want her support. I want her to know about my work, to encourage and share in my ministry, and to know that what she thinks matters to me. I finished talking and looked over. She was smiling.

The furniture is now set up, and the office looks great. On a recent day off school, Alex visited the office, checked out the books, and explored the candy dish! And I can now proudly say that I am the mother of BWIM’s newest supporter—Alex Durso.

Katrina Brooks is the co-pastor of North Broad Baptist Church in Rome, Georgia. She serves on the leadership team of Baptist Women in Ministry.



# OUTSIDE PRESSURES:

## Dealing With Denominational and Societal Challenges to Women in Ministry

BY KATRINA BROOKS

After discovering Baptist principles as a college student I severed ties with the denomination that raised me and became Baptist. I am unapologetically Baptist.

In 2004, I had a front-row seat in a discussion of Baptist principles as North Broad Baptist Church in Rome, Georgia, became involved in its local Baptist association's change in direction. Until 2004, that association upheld local church autonomy without interference as directed by its constitution and by-laws. But in 2004, when North Broad called my husband, Tony, and me as co-pastors, association leadership changed the constitution and by-laws and insisted on strict adherence to its tenets. Local church autonomy became defined as a church's right to do some things differently and maintain fellowship, but pastor selection and the role of women in the church were determined by the association's new doctrinal statement, the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message.

Although I am still unpacking things I learned during those days, here are a few:

- **Regardless of affirmation of the Baptist principle of local church autonomy, some Baptists insist on conformity as a litmus test for fellowship.** Using the claim "they will taint our witness," lines are often drawn in the sand and boundaries fortified.

- **People gravitate to notoriety.** For months, conversation in the area revolved around our congregation. We were known as the church "with a female pastor." Our website was examined,

individuals joined us for worship, and stories were circulated. Locker room conversation was kinder than many of those stories.

- **During anxious times everyone has an opinion.** Baptists and non-Baptists alike had opinions about our serving as co-pastors. Even a seminary president in another state felt compelled to comment. Another local church had a different solution "let's just run them out of town with baseball bats."

- **People who draw lines in the sand do not think it is personal.** They say they are protecting orthodoxy and doctrinal truth. To them relationships are secondary and a means to an end.

- **Physical health greatly influences reactivity.** As long as I slept properly, ate properly, exercised, and drank plenty of water, I felt equipped for the adventure. When I did not take time to re-create, the pressures took on a life of their own and informed my actions.

- **Sacrificing time alone with God to attend to outside pressures is never the correct choice.** Time with God, alone and corporately, fortifies, prepares and strengthens one for the adventure. It also provides perspective.

Truth is, there are still denominational and societal challenges to women in ministry. As Baptist women ministers, acknowledging that we will not be liked by everyone and yet determinedly pursuing our calling should be our response to those challenges. We must be the ones we are called to be . . . beacons of hope, conduits of love, and icons of grace.

### MINISTERING TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY

*In 2009, the Center for Baptist Studies in its Baptist Studies Bulletin ([www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/bulletin](http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/bulletin)) published six articles written by Baptist Women in Ministry leadership team members. Four of those articles were included in the April 2009 issue of Vocare. The other two are included, with permission from the Center, in this issue.*



# COMMUNICATION STYLES:

## Women and Men Talking to and Hearing Each Other

BY JULIE O'TETER SADLER

Julie O'Teter Sadler is Leadership Development and Women in Ministry Consultant and Coordinator of Strategic Relationships for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas, Texas. Julie also serves on the leadership team of Baptist Women in Ministry.

Traveling together, a wife asked her husband, "Do you want to stop to get some coffee?" "No, thanks," he answered truthfully. So they did not stop.

The result? The wife, who had indeed wanted to stop, was upset because she thought her husband did not care about her desire for coffee, and the husband was frustrated because his wife did not just state what she wanted. When a man and woman interpret the same conversation so differently, it is no wonder that so much has been written about how we're from different planets!

As Baptists seek to work and worship together in the local church, understanding the differences in the communication styles of women and men can help us talk to and hear each other. Deborah Tannen, in *You Just Don't Understand!* provides insight into those some of those differences. She notes that many men see themselves "as an individual in a hierarchical social order in which he was either one-up or one-down. In this world, conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to put them down and push them around. Life, then, is a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure." Women, however, often see themselves "as an individual in a network of connections. In this world, conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and

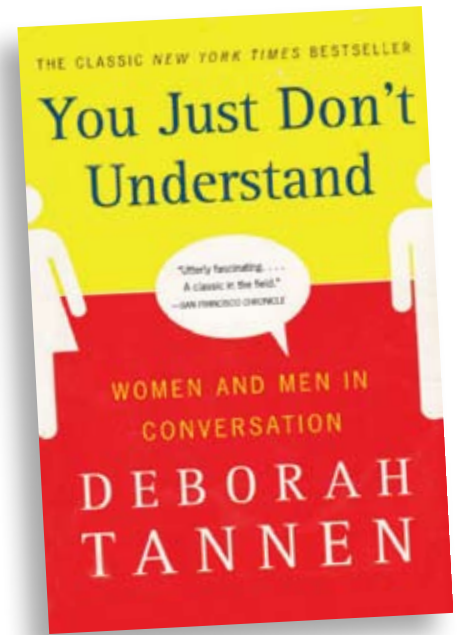
support, and to reach consensus. They try to protect themselves from others' attempts to push them away. Life, then, is a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation . . . hierarchies are more of friendship than of power and accomplishment."

Here are some of the more common areas of differences:

**Independence vs. Intimacy.** Since women often think in terms of closeness and support, they seek to preserve intimacy. Men, concerned with status, tend to focus more on independence. Women like for decisions to be discussed first and made by consensus. Men often feel oppressed by lengthy discussions and may feel boxed in if they cannot just act without discussing it first.

**Advice vs. Understanding.** Many men see themselves as problem solvers, so a complaint is a challenge to come up with a solution. But often women are looking for emotional support, not solutions. They are hoping to receive an expression of understanding or a sense of "We are the same; you are not alone." Women often feel distanced by advice, which seems to send the message, "We are not the same. You have the problem. I have the answers."

**Report-Talk vs. Rapport-Talk.** Men grow up in a world in which a conversation is often a contest, so they are generally more comfortable doing "public speaking" (report-



talk), which is a way to preserve their independence and maintain their status level. Women, however, talk to exchange confirmation and support and to establish connections, so they are often more comfortable doing "private speaking" (rapport-talk).

**Commands vs. Suggestions.** Women often begin statements with "Let's," such as, "Let's park over there" or "Let's clean up now, before lunch." Many men hear this as a command and tend to resist being told what to do. In this example, women formulate their requests or suggestions as proposals rather than orders. This style of talking is a way of getting others to do what they want, but by winning agreement first. This tactic often backfires, because if men perceive someone is trying to get them to do something indirectly, they feel manipulated and respond more resentfully than they would to a straightforward request.

As Baptists in the pew and in the pulpit, increasing our awareness of the different communication styles can greatly improve our understanding of one another, strengthen our churches, and enhance our living and sharing the gospel message.

Susan M. Shaw is director of Women Studies and director of the Difference, Power, and Discrimination Program at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon.



# GOD SPEAKS TO US, TOO

BY SUSAN M. SHAW

*Baptism at Antioch Baptist Church in Enfield, North Carolina on Pentecost Sunday*



**Front row:** Abigayle Perdue, Blair Bracey and Alexis Carter

**Back row:** Susan Joyce, current pastor, Judy Powell, former pastor, Janine Youngstrom, former interim pastor

I have spent the last few years talking to current and former Southern Baptist women. My findings were recently published by the University Press of Kentucky in *God Speaks to Us, Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home, and Society*. In many ways, my findings probably will not surprise anyone who grew up in a Southern Baptist church. We all knew that women were strong, and they ran the churches, even if they could not be pastors or deacons. What is encouraging about my findings is that despite the shifts in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), Baptist women still claim the right to their own voice even in the midst of patriarchy and fundamentalist notions about women. Time and time again, women across the spectrum from fundamentalist to progressive pointed to the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer as a central tenet of their understanding of themselves as Baptist and a key component to their sense of agency and autonomy. Even those who espoused submission, on the whole, tempered that notion with a caveat—God speaks directly to them and their ultimate allegiance is to God’s voice as they hear it and understand it.

For women in ministry, this belief that God speaks directly to them is what gave them the strength and determination to claim their calling in the face of a denomination that was not supportive. Interestingly enough, despite the pressures and horrible experiences many women in ministry have had, none of the women I interviewed denied her calling; none suggested she had perhaps heard wrong. On the contrary, most of them have found places in ministry where they thrive.

For the first generations of women in ministry living out their calling often required difficult choices. Some left to serve in other denomination. Others affiliated themselves with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) or Alliance of Baptist churches. A few stayed in Southern Baptist churches, focusing on their local work and avoiding state and national Southern Baptist politics. A small number left ministry and the church entirely.

Among younger generations of Baptist women, the openness of the CBF and Alliance has allowed them more opportunity to find places of ministry, although places for women as senior pastors remain few. Of course, another group of young women has found their place comfortably in the SBC. These women accept submission and exclusion from ordained ministry and choose to fulfill their calling in women’s ministries or other traditionally female roles.

One of the most interesting things I noticed as I talked to women ministers is the way they talked about their families, especially their children. So, I often asked them, “What did your child think of growing up with a mom in ministry?” And most of them said, “Well, you’ll have to ask her/him.” That led to my current research, “When the Pastor is Mom.” A family sociologist colleague and I are starting to talk to the children of ordained Baptist women and their moms. Right now, we are looking for research participants. If you are ordained and a mom and would like to participate, please contact me. We would like to talk to your children. My e-mail address is [sshaw@oregonstate.edu](mailto:sshaw@oregonstate.edu), and my phone number is 541-737-3082.



# THE BEGINNINGS OF AN URBAN CHURCH START

BY CARRIE DEAN

Carrie Dean, a 2009 graduate of McAfee School of Theology, is a pastoral resident at First Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia.

When my husband and I entered seminary, we had the sense of beginning a new adventure with God. We expected to find ourselves doing something unusual, perhaps a bit risky, and definitely adventurous. During our years at McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia, we developed a new love for the local church and an appreciation for all the good a church can offer its community. As we began to prepare for our final year of seminary, we were delighted to find that God was bringing together this love for adventure and the local church as we began to sense God leading us to start a church in Atlanta.

This dream to start a church began to surface during our second year of seminary. One day, Devita Parnell, congregational resources specialist for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, stopped us in the parking lot of Mercer's Atlanta campus and asked if we had ever thought about starting a church. That day, our love for the church, our appreciation for adventure, and our entrepreneurial zeal found each other, and we began to explore prayerfully this new endeavor.

Edgewood is the neighborhood in Atlanta where God eventually led us. Edgewood is a growing and transitioning neighborhood a couple of miles east of downtown Atlanta and is home to nearly 17,000 economically, racially, and educationally diverse people. Our desire was to start a church that would be connected and relevant to its community as it works to

bring the Kingdom of God into reality.

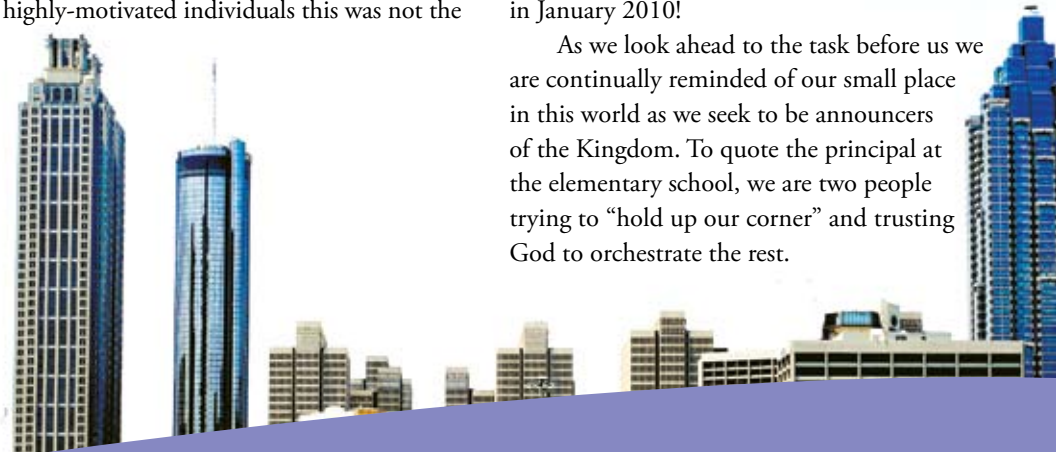
As we follow God through these beginning stages of starting a church, we are continually reminded of God's abundant grace and distinct timing. We are learning to pattern our lives after the person of Jesus rather than our own strategic designs. The work of starting a church is much more of an art than a formula. There are so many things to consider in a given community—its unique culture, its resources (I think of this as the places we see God already at work), and its needs – but most importantly, we are finding that our ability to match steps with Jesus and trust God to open doors of opportunity weigh far more heavily than our calculations and strategies.

As we began working this past summer, we expected to jump into our plans for starting Edgewood Church without delay, but as the summer progressed we sensed God calling us to slow down. Needless to say for two highly-motivated individuals this was not the

message we were looking for or expecting, but as one can expect from a loving God, it has been the very message we needed. Rather than acting on our plans for creating a church, we are learning to allow ourselves the flexibility to wait, listen, and follow God's open doors rather than blasting through walls on our own!

And God has already been faithful to open doors for us. In August, Haddock Baptist Church members helped to clean out and organize a book storage room for the elementary school in Edgewood. This opportunity went a long way toward establishing a positive relationship with the principal of this school. I have recently begun a one-year pastoral residency position at First Baptist Church in Decatur, where I will be mentored through this first phase of our church-planting efforts! Our biggest surprise, however, came to us the day before graduating from seminary when we discovered that we would be having a baby in January 2010!

As we look ahead to the task before us we are continually reminded of our small place in this world as we seek to be announcers of the Kingdom. To quote the principal at the elementary school, we are two people trying to "hold up our corner" and trusting God to orchestrate the rest.



# MARTHA STEARNS MARSHALL WOMEN'S PREACHING MONTH

## FEBRUARY 2010

Baptist Women in Ministry invites all Baptist churches to make plans now to have a woman preach on any Sunday in February 2010. The number of participating churches in the Martha Stearns Marshall Women's Preaching Month has steadily increased each year. Fifty-four churches participated in February of 2007, and seventy-six churches invited a woman into their pulpit in February of 2008. Last year, over one hundred (110 to be exact) celebrated God's gifting of women. Here's how your church can be a part:

- 1) **SAVE THE DATE!!** Reserve **ANY Sunday in February**.
- 2) Invite a woman to preach—ask a member of your church, contact a nearby seminary or Baptist university and inquire about the availability of a student or professor, or ask someone in your community. If you need help in finding the right person, contact Pam Durso at [pamdurso@bwim.info](mailto:pamdurso@bwim.info) for some ideas.
- 3) Download the certificate from the BWIM website, [www.bwim.info](http://www.bwim.info), print it out, and present it to the preacher on your church's Martha Stearns Marshall Day of Preaching.
- 4) If you would like to order a "This is What a Preacher Looks Like" T-shirt to give to your preacher, see the BWIM website: [www.bwim.info](http://www.bwim.info).
- 5) Incorporate the history of Martha Stearns Marshall during your worship service (available at [www.bwim.info](http://www.bwim.info)) or insert this information in your worship bulletins. If possible, include relevant songs in the worship service that celebrate women in ministry and women responding to God's call in their lives.
- 6) Please send your church name, city, state, pastor, the name of your guest preacher, and contact information to Pam Durso at [pamdurso@bwim.info](mailto:pamdurso@bwim.info). All participating churches and preachers will be listed in the Spring Issue of *Vocare*, the BWIM newsletter.

### BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

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