

## **This IS What a Preacher Looks Like**

### **The 2011 Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching**

#### **Colleen Swingle-Titus**

Conveying how important Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching is for me is hard. I have served for over a decade in a church that has grown to welcome my voice in the pulpit. From my beginnings as a part-time youth pastor to my now serving as a co-pastor with my dear friend David Collyer, Crozet Baptist Church has worked hard at putting belief into practice. This journey has convicted us to intentionally provide teaching and preaching opportunities for women of all ages. One way our church practices their beliefs is by dedicating the entire month of February to the Marsha Stearns Marshall emphasis.

For the past two years we have invited seminary students to preach. This year our congregation heard sermons by Katie Boykin and Kendall Ratliffe, both students at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond. Our other two February preachers were Laura Tadlock and Ka'thy Gore Chappell. All four women tackled the lectionary prescribed gospel texts in Matthew 5-7. Yes, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. One guest preacher asked, "How do you expound upon the greatest sermon ever preached?" The answer—make it applicable to 2011 in only the way YOU can, and each of our preachers did that brilliantly.

Our special month-long emphasis on women in ministry did not stop with sermons by women. We also invited young women in our youth group to share the stories of various women minister pioneers. This year Megan Adams, Samantha Lowe, Noelle Pugh, and Alex Gay taught us about Martha Stearns Marshall, Molly Marshall, Mother Teresa, and Leena Lavanya (our Baptist Mother Teresa). Our church was delighted to collect a special offering in support of Leena's work in India. Last year one our offering recipients was Lindsay Comstock, who serves as a missionary in Indonesia.

The worship leadership provided in February by these eight women blessed our church greatly. Eight gifts were shared with the hundreds who joined us on those Sundays. Eight voices were heard, reaffirming our belief that churches that claim to believe in women's giftedness should put their lip-expressed beliefs into practice. We now add eight reasons to the list of why Crozet Baptist Church is committed to continue to work until there is no need for a month to be dedicated and no need of a aqua-colored t-shirt to proclaim what so many claim to already believe.

*Colleen Swingle-Titus is co-pastor of Crozet Baptist Church, Crozet, Virginia.*

### **Commonwealth Baptist Honors One of their Own Ben Boswell**

Commonwealth Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, has a unique history as a Baptist church when it comes to supporting women in ministry. The 100-year-old church, which was formerly named Baptist Temple, was a Southern Baptist church that was not open to women in leadership for its first 60 years of existence. But in 1970, the church voted to ordain women as deacons. Not long after that, in 1973, Glynn R. Ford and Wayne Yawn led the deacons and the

congregation to request that the Mt. Vernon Baptist Association convene an ordination council to examine Elizabeth Hutchens, who was approved and ordained to the gospel ministry by the church on April 8, 1973.

Because of these two progressive and historic decisions by the church, the groundwork was laid for the calling in 1986 of Nancy Elizabeth Foil as the church's associate pastor. A native of Louisiana, Nancy received a Master of Divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. During her time in Kentucky, she was ordained, and following seminary, Nancy served for five years as associate pastor of Bergen Baptist Church in Bergen, New Jersey. In 1986, Baptist Temple called Nancy as associate pastor.

Calling a woman for a ministry position was a significantly progressive action for a church in the 1980s, especially if she was given the title of pastor. But Nancy's vivacious personality eventually won over all her critics. During her years at Baptist Temple, Nancy was involved in many civic and ecumenical organizations and events. She served as the co-chair of the Alexandria Women of Faith and was on the Office of Human Rights steering committee. Nancy was especially passionate about working with children and youth, and she encouraged the church's young people to promote racial reconciliation between white and black Baptist churches.

After the resignation of Mike Allen in 1996, the congregation made another historic decision by calling Nancy as their senior pastor. Some members left because of the decision to call a woman as the pastor, but the church stood by its principles and its conviction that Nancy was the person whom God had called to serve as their pastor.

Nancy's leadership of the church was unparalleled, and she was beloved by all in the congregation, which made it extraordinarily tragic when, in 1998, she was diagnosed with cancer and shortly passed away. The church deeply grieved her loss, but her memory continues to live on today as a testimony to all women who feel called by God to the gospel ministry.

Because of this unique history, the church gladly celebrated Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching for two years, but in 2010, the church decided to rename their monthly celebration of women preaching to honor the late Nancy Elizabeth Foil. In February 2011, Commonwealth dedicated the entire month of February to this celebration and invited four women to preach: Erika Kleiner, Kris Beckert, Kristy Moeller, and Theresa Thames-Lynch. Nancy Foil's witness now serves a continual reminder of the church's historic support of women in ministry and of their progressive heritage as a people.

*Ben Boswell is pastor of Commonwealth Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia.*

## **Report on the 2011 Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching**

**Pam Durso**

In 2011, 185 Baptist churches joined together to observe the fifth annual Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching. This yearly emphasis, sponsored by the Baptist Women in Ministry, invites churches to have a woman preach during the month of February. The Month of Preaching is named for an eighteenth-century Separate Baptist woman preacher, who preached alongside her brother and husband in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia, and the emphasis is

both a celebration of women's God-given giftedness and an opportunity to educate congregations about women in ministry.

The event has grown since in 2007, when 55 churches took part in the inaugural Month of Preaching. This year's involvement far surpassed any previous year, with 78 more churches participating than last year's 107. This year churches in 20 states and the District of Columbia invited women into their pulpits to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Churches in Cuba, Indonesia, and Uganda also participated.

Two churches had a true "Month of Women's Preaching." Both Crozet Baptist Church in Crozet, Virginia, and Commonwealth Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, invited women to preach all four Sundays in February. Two churches invited younger members of their congregations into the pulpit. St. Johns Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, heard sermons by two teenagers, Clara Howard and Mattie Kears, and 12-year-old Hannah Reese co-preached a sermon with her father, Kyle, at Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida.

Jessica Margrave Schirm preached in two different Kentucky churches in February: Central Baptist Church, Lexington and Lyndon Baptist Church, Louisville. Jessica is a hospice chaplain and also serves as children's coordinator at Central Baptist. Of her preaching opportunities, she wrote, "During the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of college, I served as a youth ministry intern alongside Dr. Jim Holladay at Lyndon Baptist in Louisville. I was just beginning to discern my call and was still very connected to my more conservative Baptist heritage. Back then I could never have imagined myself as a preacher. Now thirteen years later, I am an ordained Baptist minister, fulfilling my calling as a chaplain and church staff member. Being invited to preach at two Baptist churches for the Marsha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching, the two churches that represent my past and my present, was nothing short of an honor and a dream come true. I felt welcomed, affirmed, and supported."

Keith Herron, pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri, has led his church to participate annually in this emphasis, and his response following this year's MSM Sunday was "This is the obvious: I think the MSM emphasis is making a difference in shifting the culture of our churches. At Holmeswood, I've heard less and less from the old "thou shalt not" traditionalism and more and more from some even very traditional Baptists who now affirm the idea that we can be a church that encourages persons, male or female, to grow in their calling. They now see that preaching from our pulpit can be a generous way the called can stretch their gifts while we as a congregation hear a good word from God because we have ears to hear."