

## **A Living Example**

### **The 2012 Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching**

#### **Taylor Sandlin**

The Monday after our church's Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching Sunday, I made a hospital visit to check on a woman church member having surgery. Upon my entering the hospital room, her husband turned to his sister-in-law, who is not a church member, and introduced me, saying, "This is Taylor. He *used* to be the pastor at our church, but he brought a lady preacher in this week." I stood still quite puzzled. I did not think he was a person who would be bothered by a female preacher, but as they say, you never know. My bewildered look turned into a smile when he continued, "We're looking at replacing him with the young lady. Four people joined the church after her sermon!"

The young woman was Erin James-Brown, a student at Logsdon Seminary in Abilene, Texas. She did an exceptional job. Four people did join the church that Sunday, but that just scratched the surface of the good that was accomplished by our celebrating Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching in our west Texas church.

Erin's sermon provided another opportunity for my church to revisit the importance of encouraging the giftedness of all of God's people as witnesses to the gospel's power. Southland Baptist Church in San Angelo, Texas, has had women deacons for over two decades, and Erin was not the first woman to preach from our pulpit. And yet, the truth is that week in and week out my church hears a male preaching voice. That is not a bad thing. I am thankful for my job. But if we are not careful, our day-to-day habits can push to the back burner those values that we say are important to us. Having Erin preach gave my church one more opportunity to put our core values into practice. It also gave me an opportunity through some articles on my blog and through conversations in the hallway to help newer church members understand why we believe that God does indeed call both men and women to preach.

By highlighting one of our church's core values on Martha Stearns Marshall Day, the church itself was encouraged. I lost count of the number of members, men and women, who commented on how thrilled they were to have a woman in the pulpit. They love the idea of encouraging females who are called to the ministry, but they also love the idea of giving seminary students an opportunity to get some experience in the pulpit. Having Erin in our pulpit reminded them that God has not stopped working in the world. The gospel continues to capture the hearts and the imaginations of young people who then answer the call to vocational ministry.

I also recognize that Erin's sermon may very well be one of the vehicles that God uses to call one of the children of our church into the gospel ministry. I say children, and not just daughters, intentionally. Erin's influence is not limited to the females in the congregation any more than my voice is limited to the males. That being said, Erin's voice is especially significant for the women of my church. Even though my wife and I have told our daughter over and over again that God empowers females in the same way God empowers males, how much better is this living example!

My own life has been and continues to be shaped by many faithful women ministers, even if not all of them were honored with the title "pastor." I am thrilled to be a part of a church that not only believes God calls women to preach but also follows through by giving them the opportunity to do so. While I hope to be at Southland for a long time to come, nothing would

thrill me more than for my church member's words to someday come true. At some point in the future, I will be the former pastor of Southland Baptist Church. How wonderful would it be if a gifted, faithful young woman took my place? It is not as far-fetched as many think. The man in the hospital is ready. If my church's response to the Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching is any indication, he is not the only one.

*Taylor Sandlin is pastor of Southland Baptist Church, San Angelo, Texas.*

## **Report on the 2012 Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching**

**Pam Durso**

In 2012, 217 Baptist churches joined together to observe the sixth 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. MSM Month, as we affectionately call it, 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, and five churches had a "true MSM month" and invited four women to preach over the course of a month: Cornerstone Church, Snellville, Georgia; Crozet Baptist Church, Crozet, Virginia; Grandin Court Baptist Church, Roanoke, Virginia; Greenwood Forest Baptist Church, Cary, North Carolina; and University Baptist Church, Starkville, Mississippi.

Baptist Women in Ministry is grateful to all the churches and women preachers who participated in 2012. It is not too early to get Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching on your 2013 calendar.