

Baptist Women in Ministry

Month of Preaching

Ella Pearson Mitchell



In 2007, Baptist Women in Ministry invited Baptist churches to participate in Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching by having a woman preach during the month of February. This invitation became an annual event, one that has been a source of joy and discovery for many churches as they have celebrated the giftedness of women preachers.

BWIM named this annual preaching month for Martha Stearns Marshall, an eighteenth-century Separate Baptist woman, and for twelve years, hundreds of churches have celebrated Martha's influence and example. In 2019, BWIM redreamed this emphasis and has widened its circle of significant preachers to include three other significant Baptist preachers: Ella Pearson Mitchell, Helen Barrett Montgomery, and Edna Lee de Gutiérrez.

Ella Pearson was born in 1917 in the parsonage of Olivet Presbyterian Church, Charleston, South Carolina, where her father pastored. She began her ministry as an eight-year-old girl, riding on the handlebars of his bicycle, accompanying him on pastoral visits.

When she was older, because of her father's busy traveling schedule, Ella often preached in his churches. While a student Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama, she majored in religion, which was no small feat given that the college did not offer a major in religion. Determined to complete the degree, Ella waited until the college hired professors to teach the necessary courses and crammed all her religious classes into her senior year. At Talladega, she also led the

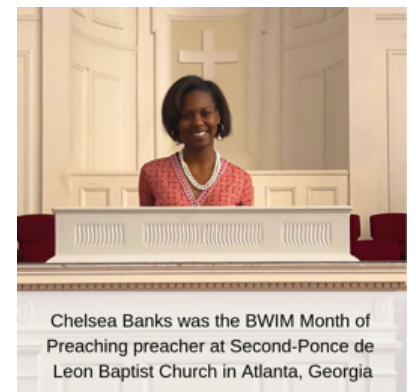
chapel services, where she read the scripture, delivered the messages, and sewed the cloth for the altar and the podium.

In 1941, Ella enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in New York, graduating two years later and becoming one of the first African Americans to graduate from that seminary. She then served for two years as minister of education at a Presbyterian church in New York City.

Ella married Baptist minister Henry Mitchell in 1944, and she soon became a Baptist. Together they were ministry partners for sixty-four years. Ella served as minister of education at the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, as associate professor of Christian education at the School of Theology at Virginia Union University, and as the first woman dean of Sisters Chapel at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. In October 1978, after thirty-five years of ministry, Ella was ordained by Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California.

In semi-retirement, Ella and Henry served for twelve years as visiting professors of homiletics at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. She also edited or co-edited six volumes of sermons by women and co-authored two books with her husband. The ministry couple team taught at seminaries from coast to coast and in England, Russia, and Zaire.

Ella Mitchell passed away on November 20, 2008. But her preaching influence lives on through the countless women and men she taught, mentored, and inspired. Today Baptist Women in Ministry invites you to remember and honor Ella Pearson Mitchell and to celebrate the giftedness of Baptist woman who proclaim the gospel.



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