

Baptist Women in Ministry track growth

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By Hannah Elliott

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ATLANTA (ABP)—About 1,600 Baptist women have been ordained to the ministry in the United States, a new report released by Baptist Women in Ministry revealed.

Authors Eileen Campbell-Reed and Pamela Durso presented their report, “The State of Women in Baptist Life,” at the organization’s annual meeting this summer in Atlanta.

The report helps validate the needs of Baptist clergywomen, illustrate growth and losses, and track nationwide trends, Campbell-Reed said.

The study reported 60 Baptist women became ordained ministers in 2005.

According to the survey, 102 women serve as pastors, co-pastors or church-starters in churches affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, or the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The study did not include traditionally African-American denominations or less-prominent Baptist organizations.

The authors said the study did not encompass all Baptist groups, but “the perspective of this report rests firmly in the moderate-to-progressive constellation of Baptist organizations in the southern United States.”

The results showed social, political and theological changes in recent decades that shifted church roles for Baptist women everywhere, they said.

“While the pastorate continues, for the most part, to be only marginally open to women, and growth there is incremental, a larger number of women now serve as associate pastors and in specialized ministry roles on church staffs,” the report states. “Many women have found places of ministry as chaplains in hospitals, prisons, the military and other organizations and agencies, although women make up only 29 percent of all chaplains endorsed by the American Baptist Churches, Alliance, CBF and SBC.”

The report started with a historical look at women in pastoral roles. One of the first groups to ordain women, Northern Baptists—now American Baptist Churches—ordained May Jones in 1882. Only after 1965, however, did percentages of ordinations rise to a more measurable level. That year, American Baptists adopted a resolution affirming the equality of women and advocating the ordination of women.

While growth has continued since then, it comes at a slow pace. According to the report, American Baptist Women in Ministry reported an increase of 13 more women who served as pastors in 2005 than 2004. Of these women, 374 served as pastors, and 29 served as co-pastors.

In the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, 5.5 percent of pastors in CBF-affiliated churches are women. About 28 percent of the chaplains and counselors in the CBF and ABC in 2005 were women, while the Alliance of Baptists recorded 52 percent of its chaplains were women. Southern Baptists reported 8 percent of their ordained chaplains and counselors

were women, according to the report.

For much of the research regarding Southern Baptists, Campbell-Reed and Durso relied heavily on work from Sarah Frances Anders, a retired professor of sociology at Louisiana College. Anders kept extensive statistics about Baptist women and in 1997 documented 1,225 ordinations of Southern Baptist women.

That same year, the report said, Anders recorded 85 women serving as pastors and more than 100 serving as associate pastors. In 2005, Baptist Women in Ministry found that of the 102 women ordained in churches affiliated with the non-SBC Baptist groups on which the report focused, 66 served as pastors, 34 as co-pastors and two as church planters.

On the mission field, percentages between male and female workers remain closer. In a section of the study that evaluated SBC mission boards, 31 percent (3,096) of the North American Mission Board missionaries in 2005 were women appointed to full-time service. For the International Mission Board, 53 percent (2,695) of the total 5,050 workers were women.

Campbell-Reed is a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Durso is associate executive director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society in Brentwood, Tenn.

Baptist Women in Ministry leaders said they plan to update the report yearly.

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