

Baptist women in ministry show marginal gains

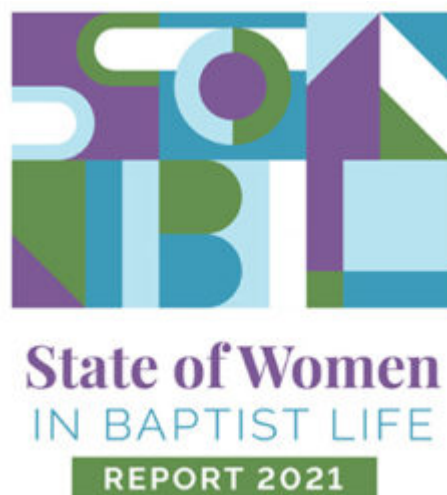
June 21, 2022

A Baptist Women in Ministry survey revealed one in four have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted while serving in their ministry setting.

About half (51 percent) of the respondents to the survey Baptist Women in Ministry conducted last fall said sexual harassment and assault were discussed rarely or never in their congregations.

“Experts assert that the rates of sexual assault and harassment are likely higher in reality than statistics reveal, because most cases go unreported,” wrote Laura Ellis, Baptist Women in Ministry project manager and author of the annual report.

“Some victims feel ashamed and fear being silenced, not believed or even blamed. Many victims have a difficult time labeling their experience as harassment or assault and find it easier to act as if it never happened. Even though the BWIM survey was anonymous, it is likely that the real number of affected women is higher.”



Baptist Women in Ministry released the survey results as part of its annual report on State of Women in Baptist Life. The June 21 release occurred one week after messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention dealt with a report on its handling of sexual abuse and debated whether to cut ties with

a church that ordained three women as pastors.

The SBC was not one of the Baptist groups surveyed. The convention's 2000 Baptist Faith and Message states, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

Survey reveals women in ministry face obstacles

The survey revealed 86 percent of the respondents reported experiencing obstacles in ministry because of their gender.

About six in 10 (59 percent) of those who responded to the survey said they felt overlooked or silenced in their ministry settings, 63 percent said they have fight for a seat at the table, and 59 percent said their judgment was questioned in their area of expertise. Seven out of 10 women (72 percent) said they had to provide more evidence of competence than their male counterparts.

In multiple areas, the survey revealed women of color experience obstacles in their ministry even more frequently than white women.

In regard to compensation, about half (49 percent) said women in ministry were not paid equally to male counterparts.

Increase in number of female pastors and co-pastors

The State of Women in Baptist Life 2021 Report revealed an increase in the total number of women pastors and co-pastors. In 2015, the organization reported 174, while it reported 272 in 2021—due partly to data from

additional groups and partly to actual increases in groups surveyed in 2015.

Baptist Women in Ministry in 2015 gathered information on the Alliance of Baptists, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Baptist General Association of Virginia, Baptist General Convention of Texas and District of Columbia Baptist Convention. The 2021 report also included data from American Baptist Churches USA and the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Every denominational group included in the report except one experienced a marginal increase in the percentage of women pastors in their congregations. The exception was the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, which increased from 8.9 percent in 2015 to 17.1 percent in 2021.

However, while the CBF showed a percentage increase, the total number of women pastors in its churches decreased from 117 in 2015 to 105 in 2021. The number of CBF-affiliated churches during that period decreased from 1,800 to 1,422.

‘Still much work to do’



Meredith Stone

“Each ordination, calling, installation and positive experience of a Baptist woman in ministry represented in this report is cause for celebration. But

Baptist women deserve safe places where they are affirmed, respected, and empowered for ministry,” said Meredith Stone, executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry.

“Unfortunately, this report reveals that there is still much work to do for an equitable Baptist world for women to become a reality.”

The number of women pastors and co-pastors in churches affiliated with the BGCT increased slightly, from 25 in 2015 to 33 in 2021.

The Baptist General Association of Virginia posted a similar slight increase in the number of women pastors and co-pastors—48 in 2021, compared to 38 in 2015.

“Texas Baptists and the Baptist General Association of Virginia are uniquely situated as state conventions who have allowed congregations the autonomy to call women as senior pastors. However, both recorded only a marginal increase with regard to women serving as pastors or co-pastors from 2015 to 2021,” Stone said.

“In the case of people who have been marginalized by the church, autonomy—while necessary and celebrated—is not enough to see progress in the form of more people created in the divine image being able to utilize fully their gifts and callings in service of the church. More concerted and visible efforts of education, advocacy and elevation within these denominational groups will be needed to move these statistics forward.”

Status of women in theological education

Baptist Women in Ministry reported 129 female students enrolled in master’s degree programs at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary in 2021, compared to 122 in 2015. The organization reported

seven female students at Truett Seminary pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree in 2021, compared to two in 2015.

Logsdon Seminary at Hardin-Simmons University had 47 women in master's degree programs and two in its Doctor of Ministry degree program in 2015. HSU trustees voted in February 2020 to close Logsdon Seminary.

Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond had 29 female students in master's degree programs and seven in its Doctor of Ministry degree program in 2015. The seminary closed its doors in 2019.

"The closing of these two seminaries meant fewer options for women to receive seminary training in a Baptist context, as well as less opportunities for men to be trained alongside and by women in a uniquely Baptist setting," Ellis wrote in the annual report.