

# Website seeks to rally support for women's ordination

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CONROE, Texas (ABP) — A former Baptist General Convention of Texas employee and her husband of 47 years have started a website urging Baptist women to speak up for their rights to be ordained as deacons and senior pastors.

Shirley and Don Taylor launched a Baptist Women for Equality (bWe) [website](#) and open letter calling on Baptist women to question church bylaws that limit certain leadership roles to men.

"The action must come from women themselves," Shirley Taylor said in an email interview. "The men have been supportive, but women have not stepped up and claimed their equality."

A lifelong Baptist, Shirley Taylor worked as a ministry assistant in the church starting center of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Taylor said men she worked for at the BGCT were very supportive of women — though her website is not associated with the state convention — but there is no church in her association that has a woman deacon.

She said that is partly due to what she believes is faulty teaching about submission, but more so because no one challenges church bylaws that

limit the offices of pastor and deacon to men.

Taylor, a grandmother of three, said she attended Baptist churches for many years without worrying about women's equality, until the Southern Baptist Convention changed the Baptist Faith & Message in 1998 and again in 2000 with views she found demeaning to women. Taylor said the SBC, America's second-largest faith group behind Roman Catholics, has "consistently shown a mean spirit toward women."

Taylor started talking to Baptist men and women and found that many — including pastors — are ready for women deacons. They know church bylaws excluding women deacons can be changed, but often treat them as if they are sacred documents and would never think of challenging them.

While visiting a large Texas church in October, Taylor coined a phrase describing such bylaws as "the cold heart of the church." It came to her as she sang along with a choir of 35 women and 15 men singing praises to God, and it dawned on her that no matter how much those women loved God, the church they served had bylaws that prevented them from serving as deacons.

### **Scripturally inferior?**

She said parents who take their daughters to a church that does not recognize women deacons and pastors tell them they are scripturally inferior to boys every time they attend.

"Every time my church observes the Lord's Supper, and I see only men going forward to serve the bread and juice, I would look at the young girls and wonder how long it would be before they realized that their church was willing to send them off to a foreign land to serve as a missionary but would not allow them to serve the congregation at home," she said.

"We expect that these girls will become Sunday school teachers and Bible

school teachers someday and will lead children to Christ. But we will not allow them to serve that child they lead to the Lord a piece of bread or cup of juice."

Taylor said churches have too long "bullied" women with selected Bible verses written by the Apostle Paul. First Timothy 3, for example, often quoted as limiting pastoral roles to men, she says was written in a time where women were considered the property of men, had little education and could not publicly speak to men who were not part of their family.

### **Giving up rights in church**

Women today take their equal rights for granted in everyday life, she said, but "foolishly" give them up in church because of a misinterpretation of Paul's words.

Taylor said for a long time she sympathized with people who said it was one thing for a church to have women deacons, but they were unsure about having a female as pastor, because it wasn't something they were used to.

That changed for her when she studied Acts 10:14-15, where Peter protests he would never eat "impure" non-kosher food and a voice replies, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." If the blood of Jesus could make a pig clean, she [reasoned](#), surely it could reverse the curse of Eve on women.

Taylor calls on women to be proactive by talking to other women and their families, friends, fellow church members and pastors. She encourages women to forward her open letter to others, and email her to join the cause.

Taylor acknowledged she has met resistance — from some people who fear men will stop coming to a church if women are in charge and others who spout Bible verses demanding the subordination of women — but she

is undeterred.

### **Changes of attitude**

"I believe that when people start talking that attitudes will change," Taylor said. "If I have changed my attitude (and I have), then what is keeping the other women sitting in their pews from coming to the same conclusion?"

Taylor said women in Baptist churches are already doing many things that a deacon does, but without the title. She said churches pick what they want to believe, allowing women equal voice in church business matters, sending them to preach as missionaries and granting them any role in church leadership except one or two.

Taylor said her husband is very supportive of the effort, spending hours faxing an abbreviated version of the open letter to churches and LifeWay Christian Stores. Together they have contacted more than 1,000 churches with their message.

"Women are tired of being bullied by men in Baptist churches with selected quotes from Apostle Paul," she wrote in the [open letter](#). "Since we allow women to be the voice to our children to bring them to salvation, how can we deny them any position God calls them to fill?"

*—Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.*