

# Baptist churches have women in ministry, panelists insist

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CORPUS CHRISTI—Women minister in most Texas Baptist churches; they just don't always carry the job title, speakers noted in a panel discussion held in conjunction with the [Baptist General Convention of Texas](#) annual meeting.

"Titles are important, but we shouldn't get hung up on them. The important thing is being true to your calling," said Barbara Hessong, minister to children at [Second Baptist Church in Corpus Christi](#).



Barbara Hessong, minister to children at Second Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, took part in a panel discussion held in conjunction with the BGCT annual meeting. (PHOTO/Eric Guel/BGCT Newsroom)

However, she felt "validated" in her calling when Second Baptist licensed her to the ministry. Second Baptist also called her "minister to children"—not "children's director" as another church had insisted she be designated, Hessong added.

"Whatever church situation you are in, whether you carry the title or not, you are a minister. It's not all about the title," she said. "But it sure helps."

Hessong participated in a panel discussion moderated by Meredith Stone, women in ministry specialist with the BGCT. Other panelists included Candy Smith, pastor of spiritual formation and ministry at First Baptist Church in Richardson; Taylor Sandlin, pastor of Southland Baptist Church in San Angelo; and Van Christian, pastor of First Baptist Church in Comanche.

Smith recalled the experience of a girl at her church who told her mother God was calling her to be a pastor.

"I love the fact that we have an environment in our church where young women can follow God's leadership and a girl can feel the freedom to tell her mom she feels God has called her to be a pastor—an environment where there are no restrictions on hearing the voice of God," she said.

Sandlin noted Southland Baptist Church dealt with the issue of women in ministry early in its history—long before his arrival—by seriously studying what the Bible said on the subject.

"The church walked through the Scripture together. We have women in ministry because the church studied the Scripture, not in spite of it," he said.

Christian likewise pointed to the biblical grounds for women serving as deacons and ministers, noting particularly the preaching ministry. The gospel message—"Christ is risen"—first was entrusted to a woman who was

instructed to make that announcement to men, he emphasized. "That ought to end the discussion."

Beyond the theological justification for full participation by all God's people in ministry, Sandlin also noted practical reasons for allowing both men and women to serve as ministers and deacons, such as service in gender-specific settings.

First Baptist Church in Comanche does not have women deacons yet, but the church has initiated deacon-led ministry teams that often include more women than men, Christian reported.

"The first step is to get people to realize they already have women deacons. They just don't call them that," he said.