

# Conference seeks to create safe space for a woman's call

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ABILENE—Women called to ministry face many questions and obstacles. Texas Baptist Women in Ministry seeks to provide a safe space for women and men to work through these questions and to empower women to overcome obstacles and follow God's call.

Women from around Texas and elsewhere gathered at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon Seminary in Abilene on Feb. 22 for the 2019 Texas Baptist Women in Ministry Conference.

## Women working through God's call to ministry

Preaching from Jeremiah 1:4-10, the story of God calling Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations, Ellen Di Giosia, pastor of First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Tenn., encouraged attendees to see themselves in Jeremiah's story.



Ellen Di Giosia preaches at the Texas Baptist Women in Ministry Conference (Photo: Hardin-Simmons University)

Jeremiah was from a religious family, presumably with expectations to become a religious leader in Judah. In the midst of that expectation, God told Jeremiah, "Before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a

prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). When he protested, God put words in Jeremiah’s mouth, an event Di Giosia said was accompanied with some pain.

Di Giosia was in college and involved in what was then called the Baptist Student Union when she began to sense God calling her to the ministry. “But I was a woman,” she said, the implication being that her sense was wrong.

“There’s no truth-telling without tears,” Di Giosia said, indicating God’s call comes with discomfort for the person called and for those to whom the called person is sent.

Female ministers know such discomfort all too well. Di Giosia was once told she needed to wear a jacket when she was in the pulpit because her “elbows were distractingly sexy.”

Despite the discomfort involved in being a woman called to ministry, Di Giosia was able to tell her ordination council, “Serving the church is really hard, and I have a lot to learn, but I have a deep conviction I was born to do this.”

## **Women encouraging women to embody their call to minister**



Texas Baptist Women in Ministry board members with coordinator Anyra Cano, center. (Photo by Julie Sorrels)

Pastor Anyra Cano, coordinator of Texas Baptist Women in Ministry,

encouraged conference attendees to build bridges. She referred to the bridge between her childhood home in El Paso and her dad's childhood home in Juarez. That bridge connected her to two people, two cultures, two languages and to the injustice and problems on both sides of the bridge.

Building structurally sound and beautiful bridges takes a lot of work, she said. There must be a plan and a purpose for the bridge. Blueprints are needed. Beauty must be intentional. And both sides must be willing to build the bridge.

Other women offered encouragement to attendees. Meredith Summers, minister to women and singles at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene, told how her perspective on ministry changed when her pastor invited a women to pray in church. Prior to that time, Summers only saw men leading in the church, but seeing a woman pray gave her a sense of connection to the church she never felt before.

Now, after Summers preaches, young women often tell her she's the first woman they've seen or heard preach and that the experience empowers them.

Jessica Watson encouraged those hurt by the church to "stop shaking their fists and pointing fingers at the church." Instead, be part of the solution. Rather than becoming angry and bitter and leaving the church, "be the church, show up and lead," she said.

## **Men empowering women to discern and grow in their call**

Conference attendees could choose from 10 breakout sessions following a lunch sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Sessions covered such topics as navigating controversy, pastoral care and self-care,

spiritual formation in difficult times, ministering in the midst of grief and responding to #MeToo.



Rev. Tamiko Jones at the Texas Baptist Women in Ministry conference (Photo: Hardin-Simmons University)

Rev. Tamiko Jones, executive director of Texas Woman's Missionary Union and a Texas Baptist Women in Ministry board member, and Rev. Dr. Michael Evans, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield and current president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, explained how they navigate the mentoring relationship.

Prior to entering ministry, Jones was a senior level electrical engineer accustomed to being in a supervisory role. Under Evans' tutelage, she had to learn to be in a subordinate role. This shift was made easier because Evans learned years earlier that when God calls someone, he has to listen to that.

It's his job to help a person explore a call to ministry because each person has to work out his or her own salvation, Evans said. Furthermore, he has to answer to God for who God sends him to shepherd.

"Time will tell me whether you're real or not," Evans said in reference to verifying a person's call.

Jones and Evans describe the mentoring relationship with the word "submission." "Submission is your humility on display," respecting the gifts a person brings to the table, Evans said. Submission is "internal security in action," Jones said.

Jones learned to submit to the process of mentoring, which required submitting to the culture of the church, building trust and being patient. As an example of submitting to culture, Jones said when she is at a church that does not affirm women in leadership roles, she does not insist on speaking from the pulpit or platform but accepts the expectations of the particular congregation.

Jones called Evans brave and fair. In response, Evans said about himself, “If the under-shepherd mishandles the flock, he has to answer to the Chief Shepherd.” As a result, Evans takes seriously the care of those who are called to ministry.

*Hardin-Simmons University provided video livestreams of the main sessions of the conference, available here: [Session 1](#), [Session 2](#), and [Session 3](#).*