

Texas Baptists avoid vote on ‘pastoral roles’ for women

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MCALLEN—When asked to approve a motion calling on the Baptist General Convention of Texas to help churches “interested in calling and employing women in ministerial and pastoral roles,” messengers to the BGCT annual meeting instead adopted an amended motion referring to “women in ministry and leadership roles.”

During the Tuesday business session of the annual meeting in McAllen, Matthew Richard, pastor of First Baptist Church in Llano and chair of the committee on the annual meeting, reported the committee considered “out of order” [two motions related to women in ministry](#) introduced the previous day.

Meredith Stone, a messenger from Calvary Baptist Church in Waco and executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry, had introduced a motion that the BGCT “affirm women in all ministry and pastoral roles, and that the BGCT Executive Board be instructed to have staff create programs, resources and advocacy initiatives to assist churches in affirming, appointing and employing women in ministerial and pastoral roles.”

Richard explained the committee considered Stone’s motion in violation of Article 1, Section 2 of the BGCT constitution.

It states: “This Convention is and always shall remain, only and solely a medium through which Baptist churches may work harmoniously in cooperation with each other, promoting the work and objects set forth in this constitution. It has not, to any degree, and shall never have any ecclesiastical authority. It shall not have and shall never attempt to exercise a single attribute of power or authority over any church, or over

the messengers of the churches in such wise as to limit the sovereignty of the churches, but shall recognize the sovereignty of the churches under the one Sovereign, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Stone told the *Baptist Standard* she had consulted an attorney and a parliamentarian who did not consider her original motion in violation of the convention’s constitution. She also noted both the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and American Baptist Churches affirm women in ministry and pastoral roles, while also stating they do not exercise ecclesiastical authority over churches.

Revised motion presented, debated



After the committee on the annual meeting ruled her original motion out of order, Meredith Stone offered a motion calling on the BGCT Executive Board staff to develop resources “to assist churches interested in calling and employing women in ministerial and pastoral roles.” (Photo / Robbie Rogers)

However, she presented a revised motion on Tuesday the committee found in order: "I move that the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board be instructed to have staff create programs, resources, and initiatives to assist churches in affirming, appointing, and employing women in ministerial and pastoral roles."

The motion sparked extended debate. Some messengers spoke against women occupying "pastoral roles."

Alex Guerra, pastor of Bateman Baptist Church in Red Rock, asserted the Bible clearly teaches the principle of "male leadership," and he said churches that support women pastors are "in rebellion against the word of God."

Others asserted the BGCT needed to clearly differentiate itself from the position taken by the Southern Baptist Convention, [limiting the pastoral office only to men](#) and [ousting churches that have women pastors on staff](#).

Jill Hudson, messenger from First Baptist Church in Abilene and coordinator of Texas Baptist Women in Ministry, said female students who feel called by God and are preparing for ministry are "unsure where the BGCT stands."

"Half of the ministers of tomorrow are female," she said.

Still others stated their personal affirmation of women in all kinds of ministerial roles, but they insisted the motion as presented would be divisive.

Collin Bullard, pastor of First Baptist Church in Longview, said he was "broadly supportive of women in ministry," and he said Texas Baptists should "make space" for women to serve. However, he acknowledged not all churches view women in ministry the same way.

“This is not an issue we should divide over,” he said.

Amendment offered as alternative

Dustin Slaton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Round Rock, offered an alternative, making a motion “that we request the BGCT Executive Board to resource BGCT staff to continue developing more strategies, resources and advocacy initiatives to assist churches in affirming, appointing and employing women in ministry and leadership roles.”

Slaton said the amended motion commits the BGCT to helping churches that want to affirm and employ women in ministry, but it “still provides room for churches on both sides of the issue to cooperate together for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Stone spoke against the amendment, saying it “substantially changes” the intent of the original motion.

In light of action taken last month at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, women in ministry “have been hurting deeply,” she said. “This is a moment when women in ministry need us.”

Andrew Bedo, pastor of Oak Ridge Baptist Church in San Antonio, said the motion allows the BGCT a way to “straddle the fence” and include churches that hold varied positions on women in ministry.

Hannah Coe, senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, asserted the amended motion “doesn’t do what we need to do” in taking “concrete action” to affirm women who feel called to pastoral ministry.

Steve Vernon, messenger from First Baptist Church in Belton and former associate executive director of the BGCT, said he has demonstrated longstanding support for women in ministry throughout his career.

However, he said, “Change happens slowly.”

Vernon voiced support for the amendment over the original motion, saying it “differentiates us from the SBC” and “moves us along” toward providing more opportunities for women without alienating churches that disagree with women in pastoral roles.

The language in the amended motion calling on the BGCT to “continue developing more” strategies and resources also acknowledges what Texas Baptists already are doing, particularly through affiliated universities and seminaries, he said.

‘Women are not a secondary issue’

The amendment passed, leaving Stone saying she felt “disappointed” the convention would not approve a statement that included language about “women in pastoral roles.”

Baptist Women in Ministry subsequently posted a statement on Facebook: “While BWIM is hopeful that the motion will provide measures of support for women ministering and leading in Texas, we are also grieved that the BGCT has communicated that women in pastoral roles of all kinds, are not included among the support the BGCT offers.

“It was also not clear if women in pastoral roles who are targeted by the SBC will be supported by the BGCT.

“BWIM will join with Texas BWIM to continue advocating for the BGCT, as well as all Baptists, to do more to demonstrate full and complete affirmation for women.

“Women are not a secondary issue and are worthy of knowing that they have a home and value among Baptists.”

On Monday, Ellis Orozco, a messenger from First Baptist Church in Richardson, had introduced a motion that the BGCT “uphold the autonomy of the local church to affirm a member church’s authority to call women to congregational and vocational ministry as they, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the guidance of sacred Scripture, see fit.”

The committee on the annual meeting considered the motion out of order because it lacked a specific call to action. The committee consulted with Orozco to draft a motion that it would consider in order. However, after messengers approved Slaton’s amended motion, Orozco chose to rescind his motion.

Note: When the story initially was posted at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, the speaker in the ninth paragraph was incorrectly identified as “Alex Meadows.” The paragraph has been corrected to identify him as “Alex Guerra.” The excerpt of Meredith Stone’s revised motion also was replaced with the full text as provided by Stone.