

Texas Baptists panel discusses women in ministry

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WACO—A panel discussion on the role of women in ministry—attempting to offer a space to listen to a diversity of views on women in ministry and learn from each other’s biblical interpretations—closed out the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting.

Almost 700 stayed after the close of business to attend the panel discussion.

“We have had conversations about the role of women in ministry for the last 25 to 30 years ... and the place that we consistently land on is local church autonomy,” said Executive Director Julio Guarneri, who moderated the discussion.

Texas Baptists have held that whatever position a church takes on this issue, it is not a “test of fellowship.”

Yet, convention leadership wanted to offer an opportunity to hear from diverse individuals on the topic “in a way that is friendly and respectful,” Guarneri explained, “so that we can have mutual understanding as a Texas Baptist family.”

The panel included Baylor’s Truett Theological Seminary Dean Todd Still and Malcolm Yarnell III, research professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, presenting academic positions.

Panelists providing pastoral perspectives were Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington; Maddie Rarick, pastor of Meadow Oaks Baptist Church in Temple; Miguel Lopez, pastor of First Baptist

Church Duncanville; and Steve Bezner, pastor of Houston Northwest Church.

All the panelists said they affirmed the dignity of men and women and some level of support for women to minister and serve within the church.

Discussion of differences

Guarneri asked panelists if the institutions or churches where they serve held an official position on women in ministry and how they reconcile their personal views with that position.

Truett Seminary has taken a clear position affirming both men and women are called by God to serve as pastors, ministers and in other ministerial vocations, Still responded. He referred those interested in a fuller statement to the seminary's [Women in Ministry](#) link, a pamphlet he wrote on the subject.

Additionally in that pamphlet, Still said he finds “no or clear compelling biblical grounds to preclude and ample scriptural materials to support women’s full and free participation in the church’s ministry as God might gift and guide.”

Yarnell said Southwestern Seminary, as an institution governed by the Southern Baptist Convention, affirms the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message and its 2023 revision related to this issue, and he “resonates with that confession.” But his current church, Lakeside Baptist Church in Granbury where he is teaching pastor, affirms the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message.

Pointing to his mentor, Leo Garrett’s, conviction that there was “no substantial confessional reason the Southern Baptists, Baptist General Convention of Texas and Southern Baptists of Texas or Baptist Missionary Alliance should be divided” on different revisions of the Baptist Faith and Message, Yarnell said he agreed with Garrett’s position.

McKissic said he coined the term “kingdomarian”—versus egalitarian or complementarian—as a better descriptor for how women and men ought to function within the kingdom of God.

“It ought to be a partnership, ... and men and women would partner together to advance the kingdom of God, sort of like Paul and Pheobe, or Priscilla and Aquilla. I see many models in Scripture of men and women partnering together advancing the kingdom.

“And I don’t recall all these theological debates in the Bible about what a woman can and cannot do,” McKissic said. The highest paid people on his church staff are women, and women preach there often, he noted.

McKissic also pointed out he believes 1 Timothy 2:12 speaks into a context where men were being excluded from church participation, so the text’s intention was to say “don’t exclude the males,” not to silence women for all time, bringing it back to a kingdom partnership between men and women.

Rarick said her church affirms the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message, and women serve in leadership in all areas of her church. The church is firmly congregational, so “I always joke that I really don’t have very much power there,” she noted.

The church’s congregational model lends itself to a strong emphasis on the gifts of its members to serve where they are spiritually gifted to serve, and she agrees with that.

Lopez said his church affirms the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message. He cited creation order and redemption order as weighty pieces in understanding “what we should or shouldn’t do.”

While his church invites all men and women “to grow to their fullest redemptive potential,” he asserted the church should look different than the world, saying 1 Timothy limits the office of elder to males.

Lopez reconciles this through his conviction that Jesus is the head of the church, and the “head of the church is the God-man, not the God-human, the God-man forevermore. If we can all submit to this man, maybe we can all submit to each other.”

Bezner explained his background is in ministry contexts where women were seen as fully equal to men. Yet the church where he serves was a church where women’s participation in worship was extremely limited.

Despite reservations, both he and the church believed the Holy Spirit was leading him to serve there. Some aspects of women’s service they were able to change quickly and easily when he arrived.

Other changes, however, required a larger conversation. Through a committee and ground rules to help build trust, the church eventually decided they would affirm women serving in any role except that of elder.

Bezner was able to reconcile his own views with this compromise by spending hours of time over multiple years examining the texts with people whose views differed from his own.

“But I came to recognize that they love Jesus, and they love the Scripture. And I could worship with those individuals,” he said.

Panelists also provided biblical justification of their positions.

McKissic noted in Revelation 2:18, “Jesus addressed the content of what was taught, not the container.” In the passage, Jesus had ample opportunity to say she shouldn’t have been preaching because she was a woman, but he didn’t.

“If the fundamental problem was that she was a female, I think he would have addressed that as being the core issue. ... If Jesus could approve of a woman in a coed group in a New Testament church, why can’t I?” McKissic

noted. Then he literally dropped the mic.

Additional responses

But the discussion continued.

Rarick recalled meeting with the panel a few weeks earlier and appreciating the diversity of views along a continuum. But, she noted, “It’s important when we hear about women in ministry that we hear from a variety of women in ministry.”

Bezner stated he will feel at home with Texas Baptists for as long as the BGCT remains a place where the “words of life are proclaimed.”

There are no perfect churches or denominations, but “I heard Al Curley preach the words of life. I heard Meghan Hendrickson preach the words of life. Dr. Joel Gregory preached the words of life. And even though he said it wasn’t a sermon, Dr. Ronnie Marriott preached the words of life. ... So, why would I leave?”