

Editorial: Women are integral to Texas Baptists' mission

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"We're not an issue-driven convention; we're a mission-driven convention," Julio Guarneri, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, told attendees at the end of the second business session of the 2023 BGCT annual meeting in McAllen.

Guarneri received a rousing response. His description of the BGCT as mission-driven was one of the most well-received statements made during the annual meeting, because it is a statement of identity that resonates with Texas Baptists.

I see in the floor discussion of motions about women in ministry evidence of Texas Baptists' shared desire to take their mission seriously. And what is their mission? To communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to all people, beginning in Texas and reaching around the world. Women are integral to that mission.

Discussing women in ministry

[As reported by Ken Camp](#), both motions were ruled out of order and revised. Tuesday morning, during floor discussion on the first motion—made by Meredith Stone—an amendment was offered and passed. The main motion subsequently was passed as amended. Ellis Orozco—who made the second motion—withdrew his motion after Stone's amended motion passed.

Stone's revised motion read: "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.”

After a handful of messengers spoke for and against Stone’s motion and time was called, a motion was passed to extend the time for discussion by 10 minutes, because the discussion of women in ministry is important for the BGCT.

Dustin Slaton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Round Rock, then brought an amendment to Stone’s motion: “I move 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.”

In explaining the amendment’s intent, he said many Texas Baptist churches love, empower and equip women while still holding to a complementarian position—the belief that certain leadership roles, such as pastor, are limited to men.

His amendment offered a middle way between completely rejecting both motions and approving a motion critics saw as infringing upon autonomy of the local church.

Support for the amended motion was strong, but it was not universal. An interesting coalition emerged, albeit small in appearance, to vote against it—those who thought the amendment did not affirm women strongly enough and those who oppose women in pastoral roles of any kind.

Both of these groups—the one for the original main motion and those strongly opposed to that motion in any form—were left in agreement over the amended motion. Neither wanted it.

What did all groups in the room hold in common? They all take seriously

Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all people, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. They agree Texas Baptists' mission is to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to all people, beginning in Texas and reaching around the world.

Where Texas Baptists want to focus

The majority of messengers in attendance affirmed the amended motion. The amendment expressed their desire that the BGCT not divide over the issue of women in ministry.

Like Guarneri, messengers to the 2023 annual meeting want to focus on mission, not issues—while understanding issues are important because they involve people. They want to take the issues seriously, and they don't want the issues to supersede the mission.

For many who voted for Slaton's amendment, they see the mission as so big and so important that it shouldn't be scuttled over disagreement about whether women can be called to and serve in pastoral roles. The truth is, many Texas Baptists don't believe women can.

For many Texas Baptists, the urgency and sheer scale of the work involved in communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ is too great to wrestle over whether we have enough agreement about women in ministry to be able to work together.

Guarneri also received a strong affirmative response to his declaration that "doctrinal uniformity" shouldn't distract from "missional fidelity."

This doesn't mean doctrine doesn't matter. Doctrine matters immensely. But our devotion to doctrine shouldn't outstrip our humility, and our passion for it shouldn't exceed our passion for our mission.

But how often do we burn hotter when our doctrinal positions feel

threatened than we do for communicating the good news of Jesus Christ?

As I see it, messengers to the 2023 BGCT annual meeting, by adopting the amended motion on women in ministry, sent the message women are integral to Texas Baptists' mission.

Additionally, messengers communicated that churches who affirm women in ministry and churches who do not both have a place where together they can communicate the good news of Jesus Christ for all people, beginning in Texas and reaching around the world.

As we seek to communicate that good news, we need to consider the full reach of it. When we seek to communicate Jesus' good news to women under duress outside the church, will they be able to see that same Jesus in the way we care for the women inside the church?

Following the vote, Baptist Women in Ministry posted an [update](#) to their Facebook profile expressing their concerns with the motion as passed. Among those concerns is that the motion did not make "clear if women in pastoral roles who are targeted by the SBC will be supported by the BGCT."

What that support ought to be and how the BGCT can demonstrate such support warrants healthy and diligent conversation leading to God-honoring action. Doing so reflects on our mission.

We have one mission, a shared mission—to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to all people, beginning in Texas and reaching around the world. This is not a mission for some of us. It is a mission for all of us and needs all of us—men and women, boys and girls.

Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist Standard. He can be reached at eric.black@baptiststandard.com. The views expressed are those of the author.