

Voices: What does 6.5% have to do with your church?

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During the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's annual general assembly a few weeks ago, Baptist Women in Ministry hosted a worship service and two workshops.



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As people entered BWIM's worship service, they received a pin. The pin was purple, and in white lettering, it said, "6.5%." People began asking each other: "What does this mean? What is 6.5 percent?"

When BWIM Executive Director Pam Durso welcomed everyone to worship, she explained the meaning of the pin with words she also published in a [blog posted the following week](#).

"Six point five percent is the percentage of Cooperative Baptist churches that are led by women pastors," Dr. Durso said. "That percentage has been steadily increasing in the past 10 years—there is much to celebrate! But there is more work to be done. ... We need everyone's voice, everyone's support as we work to move 6.5 percent to 10 percent and then to 20 percent and beyond."

Numbers & perspectives



At the worship service, everyone was encouraged to wear the pin during CBF's general assembly as a means to start conversations about women in ministry among CBF churches. The conversations varied from hope for continued growth, to disappointment the percentage wasn't higher.

One male pastor even said to me, "I'm embarrassed to wear this pin that brags about my 93.5 percent."

Among congregations affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, our percentage of women pastors is much lower—around 0.5 percent.

For some, this number is not a problem. They do not want to see women pastoring churches. Others are disappointed the number isn't larger and hope the percentage can increase. They might even feel uncomfortable bragging about being in the 99.5 percent.

So, for those congregations that support women in ministry in BGCT churches and are feeling the tension of disappointment and hope, I would like to offer a few suggestions specifically to your search committees. While I hope pastor-search committees will consider these ideas, I offer the following encouragements to *all* search committees that might be considering women and men side by side for positions such as youth ministers, children's ministers, associate pastors, education/discipleship ministers, etc.

Think the same

First, think about women candidates the same way you think about male candidates.

What I mean is if an issue isn't something you would ask or worry about with a male candidate, then you shouldn't ask or worry about it with a female candidate.

For example, if you don't worry that a man's handsome appearance would be too distracting for the female members of the congregation, then you shouldn't worry that a woman is too attractive and would present a temptation for male congregants.

If you wouldn't ask a male candidate if he is planning on starting or expanding his family during his ministry at your church, then you shouldn't ask a female candidate that question.

If you don't worry about a man's ability to minister to both men and women in your congregation, then don't worry if a woman can effectively serve congregants of the opposite sex.

Think differently

Second, think about women candidates differently than you think about male candidates.

Women are not afforded the same opportunities as men in church ministry, so women's resumés look different. Committees would do well not to discard a woman's resumé simply because she doesn't have the requisite number of years of church ministry experience. Instead, committees should consider how a woman's experiences translate into the skills and development required in the position for which she is applying.

For example, if a woman has been a teacher, her skills in teaching, curriculum development and interacting with students, parents and

administration will translate well into children's, youth or education ministry. If a woman has run a nonprofit, she has learned leadership—pastoral vision, relating to a board—working with deacons, and how to manage a budget—stewardship.

Discern presentation

Another way in which committees need to think differently about women candidates is in discerning how women may present themselves. Men who appear confident and self-assured often are revered and considered excellent leaders, while confident women often are called vulgar names and considered overly aggressive.

So, the women who committees interview might not say things the same way men say them. While a man might feel more comfortable saying, "I am called to be your pastor, so you should hire me," a woman instead might say, "I feel as though God is leading me toward this type of ministry, and I hope you'll consider me."

Although the pieces of advice I mention here may seem to contradict each other, both are related to the way culture has taught us to perceive women.

By considering these things, we would hope, search committees will not let culture influence how God's creation is judged, but instead they might be able to view 100 percent of people as created in the image of God.

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Editor's note: To visit the Baptist Women in Ministry website, [click here](#). To read Baptist Women in Ministry's "State of Women in Baptist Life" report, [click here](#).