

A statement from BWIM on the failure of the SBC's Law Amendment

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BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Baptist Women in Ministry offers appreciation to all the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) who voted against the Law amendment BECAUSE of their commitment to support and affirm women serving as pastors of all kinds in the SBC.

We are grateful to churches and messengers represented at the SBC who came to send the message that women have equal value to God. We know that others voted against the amendment for other reasons, but we hope the message of your support for female pastors will be amplified.

But even though the amendment did not pass, we are also grieved that this vote has ever even taken place. Further, the 61% of messengers who voted for it (66% was required to pass) demonstrate that women in ministry are still devalued.

Decades ago, the SBC codified its ideological position of disregarding God's call on women in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Therefore, the amendment considered today was not constructed on its own merit since the basis for it was already decided. Instead, women in ministry were used as props for the display of extreme conservatism in order to advance the power of a faction within the SBC.

In the conflict surrounding this action for a stricter enforcement of oppressive theology, women have been further harmed. Millions of women have heard as the incorrect message that they do not have equal value to God and the church has been amplified.

Baptist Women in Ministry expresses solidarity with all women who have been faithfully following God's call in Southern Baptist churches as pastors of all kinds and who were placed at the center of a debate for power.

We know that even though the amendment failed, women who pastor in Southern Baptist churches will continue to be diminished, demeaned, and denigrated. Southern Baptists will continue to silence women. Southern Baptists will

continue to not listen to women and not believe women when they say they have been harassed, traumatized, abused, and also when they say God has called them to serve in pastoral ministry.

So in the aftermath of conflict surrounding this vote and the messages that Southern Baptists have sent about their belief in the inequality of women, we want to amplify the following exhortations.

For all women among Baptists who have not been believed for various reasons, hear us now say that we believe you. We see God's image in you. We know that you are worthy of respect and being treated as fully human. We know that you make the church a better reflection of the fullness of God's love. You are valued by God and have equal value to God's work in the world. We believe you.

Further, as churches who remain connected to the Southern Baptist Convention contemplate what the actions of the SBC this week mean to them, Baptist Women in Ministry urges you:

1) Even though it didn't pass, do not neglect the impact that this vote and conversations about it within your church have on the women who are at its center. This is not an abstract matter to women in ministry, this is personal. Women do not want to cause church conflict, but they also deeply desire the church to affirm God's call and gifting in their lives. Women's bodies and souls hold the tension of every word spoken on this matter knowing that it is their faithfulness to God that is being called into question. Be sure to provide immense care for female ministers in your congregations with thoughtfulness and intention in these days.

2) Titles are important, especially in roles which have traditionally been denied to certain people. Titles are more than labels for particular jobs, titles are a means of honoring a person's gifts and call. Titles can demonstrate your church's belief in God's work in and through women. A woman with a title of pastor is a woman whose call is believed.

3) By nature, growth is conflict. When something is growing, the status quo is disrupted. Avoiding conflict out of fear creates stagnation and immobility in your congregation. Jesus models loving ways to step into necessary conflict. Seek Christ-like, love-motivated conversations around your church's response to the amendment for the sake of the growth and health of your congregation. Do let fear rob your church of the opportunity to grow the reach of the beloved community.

Finally, for churches who support women in ministry, whether connected to the Southern Baptist Convention or not, we also commend you that now is the time to demonstrate your support publicly. Women and churches need to see that there Christ-followers who believe women, who equally value women in the work of the church, and who honor the image of God in all people.

Baptist Women in Ministry proclaims the truth that there are no limits to women's value to God and there are no limits to how women can serve God in the church. May we all work together to obliterate any and all limitations placed on women so that we do not limit how God can work with all humanity to bring redemption, justice, and hope to a world in desperate need of the God who is love.