

# BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY OF NC

## BWIM,NC's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convocation

By Alicia Davis Porterfield

The many faces of BWIM, NC gathered on April 11<sup>th</sup> at Ridge Road Baptist Church in Raleigh to celebrate 25 years of God's faithfulness. The church generously provided a breakfast spread for our folks, where many lingered to catch up, make new introductions, and look at some BWIM,NC memorabilia. Rev. Anne Thomas Neil was present to sign copies of the book chronicling her life, *Journey Without Map* (also available at [www.adventcenter.org](http://www.adventcenter.org)). Dr. Pam Durso, our proclaimer for the day, also brought along books about women in Baptist life.

Worship focused on "The Cloud of Witnesses," referenced in Hebrews 12, with the "Cloud of Witnesses" Quilt forming the ban-

ner backdrop for the entire service. The quilt contained names of over fifty women who have been witnesses to the people of BWIM,NC. Master quilter Terri Sharpe of Sanford embroidered each name by hand, recording the teachers, parents, grandparents, professors, neighbors, GA leaders, friends, and mentors whom God has used to help shape and guide the people of BWIM,NC. The quilt helped raise the final amount needed for the Kay Simpson Endowment Fund to reach \$25,000 - and then the stock market plunged and we lost some of it! But



like the women in ministry that we support,

we will persevere, knowing that God has a vision for us that will bring blessing.

During the worship service, liturgical dancers from WFU's Divinity School and soloist Emily Huff (a former scholarship recipient) presented "Ancient Women's Words: A Cycle of Biblical Songs, reminding us of the witnesses of scripture." The cycle was written by Dr. Susan Borwick, a returning Board member and professor of music at WFU. Durso preached on Joshua 3:1-4, where the Israelites are told to follow the ark because they "have never been this way before." Durso paralleled the journey of the Israelites into new territory to that of Baptist women in ministry

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## 2008 Martha Stearns Marshall Day of Preaching

by Pamela Durso

Seventy Baptist churches across the nation joined together on February 3, 2008, to observe the second annual Martha Stearns Marshall (MSM) Day of Preaching. Churches in fourteen states and the District of Columbia invited women into their pulpits to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The event has grown since last year when fifty-five churches participated in the inaugural MSM Day of Preaching.

Sponsored by Baptist Women in Ministry, the MSM Day of Preaching is named for Martha Stearns Marshall, an eighteenth-century Separate Baptist woman preacher. The event is both a celebration of women in the pulpit and an opportunity to educate congregations about women in ministry.

As a result of the MSM Day of Preaching, one Alabama congregation will have a woman preacher in its pulpit for the first time. Pint-

lala Baptist Church in Pintlala, Alabama, will observe the Day of Preaching in April. The church's pastor, Gary Burton, is looking forward to having Ellen Sims, associate pastor at Hillcrest Baptist in Mobile, Alabama, preach to his congregation. "Inviting female clergy to preach for the Pintlala Baptist Church was something I had always wanted to do," Burton noted, "but I was bound by the inertia of the past.

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## Interview with Ruby Fulbright 2008 Anne Thomas Neil Award Recipient

By Alicia Davis Porterfield

### What are some of your first memories of learning about God?

I feel like I am one of the fortunate ones in that I was raised in a Christian home and can't remember not going to church. The most influential person in my life – ever – was my father. It was from him that I learned about God and God's unconditional love. I didn't realize all I was learning from him until I was older, but the way my dad loved God, the way he expressed God's love to others made a lasting impression on my life.

I also feel fortunate in that I was part of churches who taught me that God not only loved me, but He loved the whole world. And, one of the reasons I'm so passionate about missions education for children and young people is from my own experience. I had GA (Girls in Action) leaders who really felt that part of God's plan for their lives was to help little girls know about God's world, about the peoples of the world and that, even as a little girl, there were things I could do to share God's love with that world.

### When/where/how did you begin to sense God's call in your life?

Again, because of good training and good examples to follow, it was easy for me to accept God's love for me and to "ask Jesus into my heart". I was seven and it was *real* to me. I've never doubted that experience. I remember when I was in seminary, it was questioned if I could have really understood what was happening because 7-year-olds don't think abstractly. All I can say is that Jesus was and is real in my life and has been for 55 years.

And, again, it was my dad who helped me to understand what following Christ was all about. Did I get it all right, all the time – most certainly not. I still don't. But, for me the education, training and mentoring has made all the differ-

ence.

It was while I was at GA camp that I really began to sense that God was calling me into something more – I can still remember the feeling of His presence and the "idea" of being a missionary. I kept that feeling all the way through school – when folks would ask me, "What do you want to be/do when you grow up?" I'd say, "A missionary."

I went to college knowing that's the path I should follow – BUT, I began to have doubts and so I kept it to myself. It was after I met and fell in love with the man who would become my husband, that affirmation of my call to missions came – it was his call as well. In fact, he didn't actually ask me to marry him. What he said was, "Will you go with me to a foreign country?" Back in those days, I understood that to mean marriage. Ha! Ha!

### Who were some of the people who encouraged you in that call?

Again, it was my dad who was my biggest supporter. But, I received affirmation and encouragement from folks like Sue Fitzgerald – she was my BSU Director at Mars Hill, from friends and the churches I was part of.

### How did that call take shape in your life—how did you answer it?

It seemed as though the sermons I heard, the books I read, the people who crossed my path, the missionaries I heard – all seemed to point in one direction. That was missions and as I understood it at that time, it was foreign missions. When my family and I went to Zambia, we made the commitment to be career missionaries. We thought about what that meant. We prepared our families for the possibility and we made the commitment. We spent 12 years in Zambia and each day I knew I was

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## Interview with Ruby Fulbright

in the right place.

### **Tell us about some of the different roles you have held and what God taught you through them?**

**Pastors' Wife** - I was “green” as can be. I was very young and had a lot to learn. The churches that Ellis pastored before we went to Zambia – Pine Ridge, Zebulon and Rural Hall loved me, nurtured me and encouraged me to use my gifts. I was never made to feel that I was second place. Ellis and I were a team – partners and our gifts complimented each other.

**Career Missionary** - I often say I learned more and received more than I gave during our 12 years in Zambia, Africa. It was the most overwhelming, mind and body stretching, frightening, but rewarding experience up to that time in my life. God taught me a lot of walking by faith; trusting Him for the big things and the small. He helped me see that the work was His, but I had a significant part in being His hands and feet and voice to a hurting world. Because of God's leadership to live in Africa, I learned a great deal from the Africans. I learned what it really means to be content and joyful in the Lord in the midst of such pain and hardship. I learned to sing and dance and celebrate in a way I hadn't experienced as a Baptist before. I made lasting friendships with Zambians and missionaries. I also learned how important it is for Christians to work together – not be so exclusive or dogmatic in insisting on our way of doing things.

**Minister on a church staff** – I learned some things about “church” and church people I wish I hadn't had to learn. But, I also discovered and developed gifts and skills that I had not developed before. I learned of my passion for worship and leading others to do so. I learned of my need for more contemplation and reflection to be all God intends for me to be. During my time in Africa, I learned more

of my need to really depend on God. On a church staff, I learned how to take care of myself spiritually.

**Executive Director WMU NC** – As I have traveled my life's journey each new adventure or challenge or opportunity builds on my previous opportunities and prepares me for the next. I never had any aspiration to greater leadership roles and so it took me several months to even agree for my name to be considered as Executive Director of WMU NC. And, when they asked me to consider the position, it took many more months before I said “yes”. I've been in this position nearly six years and they have been some of the most challenging in my life. But, there is a sense that I'm here for a purpose.

**Mom** – I must not forget one very important role because I've learned much about myself and about dealing with people, little people and grown-up people, from being a mom. My three children are my “crowning glory” if I have one. They continue to teach me about faith and calling.

### **How did you experience God working as WMU NC decided to move to a new home and complete financial independence? How do you think God prepared you to lead in “such a time as this?”**

It was a deep sense of God's presence and working in us as staff and executive board members - a sense that He had something more for us to do; the enormous need around us that we witnessed and heard about; and a church culture that didn't seem to be making a huge difference - that we asked for God's wisdom, vision and courage. The events of the last couple of years are all part of that, I think. A deep burning in my heart to preserve the history and heritage of WMU has placed me in the news in NC Baptist life – and in some instances even further away. I have peace that as an or-

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*“In the process of all that we have fought for because we are passionate about WMU, we've made a statement for women. One of our core values states that we recognize the giftedness of women and girls and accept the responsibility to help them use their gifts in serving Christ.”*

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## MSM Day of Preaching

*“Some years ago McClendon had a conversation with a Second Baptist church member while they were standing in the hallway listening to a guest preacher. The member said to McClendon, “You should be doing that.” McClendon remembered responding, “I can’t do that. I’ll never do that.” The member retorted, “You’re just chicken.” McClendon then told the congregation: “I’m here today because nobody calls me ‘chicken’.”*

Cultural traditions blinded me to present opportunities. So the Martha Stearns Marshall Day of Preaching became the impetus I needed to invite Ellen Sims to preach in April. I can’t wait.”

Other churches observed the Sunday for a second time, including Second Baptist in Lubbock, Texas, where the guest preacher for the MSM Day of Preaching was Michelle McClendon, a former staff member at that church. Philip Wise, pastor of the Lubbock church, recounted a story from McClendon’s sermon. Some years ago McClendon had a conversation with a Second Baptist church member while they were standing in the hallway listening to a guest preacher. The member said to McClendon, “You should be doing that.” McClendon remembered responding, “I can’t do that. I’ll never do that.” The member retorted, “You’re just chicken.” McClendon then told the congregation: “I’m here today because nobody calls me ‘chicken.’”

Both Sims and McClendon are experienced preachers, but for some Baptist women, the MSM Day of Preaching provided one of their first opportunities to preach in a church. Allison Hicks, a second-year student at McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta, had preached in her home church, but February 3 was the first time she had preached in another church on a Sunday morning. Preaching at Covenant Community in Elba, Alabama, was “a wonderful experience in learning and growing,” she said. “I was absolutely blessed by the church’s hospitality and the words of affirmation that now echo in my ears.”

The sermons preached on MSM Day of Preaching were as varied as the women participating. At Northside Drive Baptist in Atlanta, Georgia, Liz Harris-Lamkin delivered a sermon titled, “Testimony - One Woman’s Experience in Ministry.” Telling of her own baptism, Harris-Lamkin recalled that as she waited to wade into the waters, an older woman’s hands rested on her shoulders. The woman’s hands were trembling, and Harris-Lamkin concluded, “Perhaps ministry is like that. We live out our baptism, called into deep waters, though there is plenty to tremble about.”

Carolyn Blevins, retired professor of religion at Carson-Newman College, was the guest preacher at First Baptist, Jefferson City, Tennessee. Blevins began her sermon by saying, “We have a problem. We have a woman problem. We have a Baptist woman problem. The problem is: numerous Baptist women have taken being a Baptist seriously.” She concluded by asking these questions: “What if our church encouraged every person toward true soul freedom, taking seriously a personal relationship to God? What if our church became more diligent about Bible study, enabling our members to experience the joy of Bible freedom? What if our church used our church freedom to dare to be what God wants us to be in our community?”

Baptist Women in Ministry in 2009 will again sponsor the Martha Stearns Marshall Day of Preaching. Churches are encouraged to mark their calendars now and plan to invite a woman preacher into their pulpit on the first Sunday of February.



Maria Swearingen preached at Lystra Baptist, Chapel Hill, during MSM Day.

## 2008 Addie Davis Award Recipients National Baptist Women in Ministry

In 1964, Addie Davis was the first Southern Baptist woman ordained to the ministry. Baptist Women in Ministry gave the first awards in honor of Addie Davis in 1998. This year we gave two \$1000 scholarship awards, Excellence in Preaching and also Pastoral Ministry, in memory of Addie Davis who died in December of 2005.

Bailey Edwards Nelson is the recipient of the Addie Davis Award for Excellence in Preaching. Bailey graduated from McAfee School of Theology with a Masters of Divinity in May 2008. She used Genesis 32:24-28 as her sermon text and entitled her sermon *Hit the Mats*. She related how Jacob wrestled with an angel and

## Addie Davis Award Recipients

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how when we wrestle with God, there is mutual submission. She also reminded us that after the encounter, Jacob walked with a limp—and through our own experiences and struggles, we all walk with a limp. Bailey has accepted a Pastoral Residency at Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church in Jacksonville, FL.

Caroline Lawson is the recipient of the Addie Davis Award for Outstanding Leadership in Pastoral Ministry. Caroline is a Masters of Divinity student at Duke Divinity School. She currently serves as the pastoral intern for a year at Morris Chapel UMC in Walkerton, NC, as part of Duke's field education program. Caroline wrote, "There is not a single moment of 'calling.' There are millions of moments, which snowball into a gentle nudging to care for the church. These moments make me who I am. I am a minister. Ministry requires a set of skills; however, my 'ability' often depends upon my own weaknesses or my willingness to recognize the brokenness of my gifts in ministry. My ministry experiences are not noteworthy because of my ability but rather because of the One who works despite my weakness and my strength."

Seminaries will receive nomination packets for the 2009 Addie Davis Awards in early 2009. Each seminary receiving a nomination packet may nominate one Baptist female student for each award. For more information, contact Julie O'Teter at Julie.oteter@bgct.org or 214-887-5470.



Bailey Edwards Nelson, recipient of the Addie Davis Award for Excellence in Preaching



Caroline Lawson, recipient of the Addie Davis Award for Outstanding Leadership in Pastoral Ministry.

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**2009  
Martha Stearns  
Marshall  
Day of  
Preaching  
February 8, 2009**

*Plan to invite a woman  
preacher  
into your pulpit.*

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## Fulbright Interview

(Continued from page 3)

ganization we're making the right decisions and that God still has work for us to do – work that will be significant enough to warrant positive news coverage in the future, if we stay true to our calling.

In the process of all that we have "fought" for because we are passionate about WMU, we've made a statement for women. One of our core values states that *we recognize the giftedness of women and girls and accept the responsibility to help them use their gifts in serving Christ*. Many people have said that I have done more for women than I

realize. If that is so, I am grateful.

As you would guess following God's leadership during these last few years has been difficult – some days so difficult, I wanted to give up. But, they have also been exciting days as we've watched God provide for us and work in and through us when the element of faith was absolutely essential.

God has shown us, again, that He is indeed faithful. We still have some uphill challenges, but we also have exciting opportunities for the future. I am blessed to be part of all of it. And, He is still teaching me – some things that I have to keep relearning, but also new things.

**BAPTIST WOMEN IN  
MINISTRY OF NC**

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following God's call into places they "have never been before." God's faithfulness in guiding the Israelites has been reflected God's faithfulness in bringing BWIM,NC through 25 years of changes and growth. To God be the glory!

The luncheon following allowed for more celebrating and fellowship. Over a delicious meal, people were able to reconnect and connect anew. Ridge Road Baptist Church received the Church Award and WMUNC Director Ruby Fulbright received the Anne Thomas Neil award, with the added blessing of Anne being present to see the award given (please see interview with Ruby Fulbright). In all, it was a wonderful day of celebrating and thanksgiving to God for 25 years of guiding and nurturing BWIM,NC. Thanks to all who participated in making BWIM,NC's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary a blessing.



Above: Attendees of the BWIM,NC 25th Anniversary Celebration: members of Ridge Road Baptist, former ATN Award winners, Campbell University Div. Sch. reps and women pastors

Below: Velma Ferrell, Anne Thomas Neil and Geneva Metzger

