

Even Moderate Churches Don't Want Women in Their Pulpits

Women are welcome?!

My initial, gut-level reaction is “Ha!”

Apparently, some misogynist made a comment mocking Beth Moore, which has sparked moderate Baptists and others to launch several campaigns supporting women clergy.

One says, “Women aren’t going home. They are welcome in this church.”

While moderate Baptist churches will indeed hire women and “allow” them to fill their pulpits from time to time (especially in February when they feel obligated to have a woman in the pulpit so they can receive positive press for Women’s Month of Preaching), women are far from welcome as ministers in too many congregations – even so-called “moderate” churches.

Many churches will still not:

- Hire a woman (especially a mother of young children) for the role of senior pastor.
- Negotiate pay with women ministers during the hiring process.

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- Provide equal or even reasonable salaries for women on ministerial staff.
- Offer the legal standard of care for women during maternity leave (sometimes not even having a policy at all and asking the pregnant minister to research and write her own policy).
- Provide adequate or any childcare for events occurring on Sunday or Wednesday, leaving many mother ministers to attend meetings with their infants or toddlers in tow (and opening themselves up to snide remarks about being unprofessional or expressions of disapproval when mom has to move a child or tend to a child during the meeting).

The list could go on and on from what we wear on Sunday to the veiled ways denominational groups exclude and treat women (and LGBTQIA folks).

I'm not even going to get into the micro-aggressions against women (and LGBTQIA folks) that happen all the time in church by both congregants and staff.

I will also refrain from speaking about the sexual abuse and harassment so many women have faced in their leadership roles, from male ministers, church leadership or congregants.

If you are willing to write off all these experiences as my own "unfortunate experiences" that "aren't that common," you are part of the problem and in serious denial of what's happening in moderate Baptist churches - not just conservative ones.

I'm sure some readers will begin thinking of exceptions to what I'm describing; certainly, some congregations don't follow these trends in every way.

Yet, they remain exceptional and come quickly to mind precisely because they stand out from the norm.

Many women in ministry stay silent because they don't want to lose the job they worked extra hard to get (knowing limited jobs are out there), even if things aren't always fair or equitable.

Or they are made to feel as if their complaints are unmerited, "emotional" and "silly."

I'll leave you with this: At my first annual review as a part of a church staff, I received nothing but positive marks about my "work," but I was reprimanded for my "unwillingness to open up and share about my family and my feelings."

I was told during my annual review that I was "closed off" simply because I valued privacy and boundaries.

Another example was given, "Your emails just say what you need or a question you have. You never make pleasantries or ask, 'How's your day going?'"

This would never be said to a man in any job; quite the contrary, it would be seen as a good businessman focused on getting his job done.

I was young and didn't know how to respond to these horrible experiences, so I endured years of ridicule, sexism and abuse causing damage that only

snowballed.

A man would never have been told these things or been made to feel inadequate because of their very personhood.

Imagine how the following situations would make you feel:

- Having your maternity leaves called “vacations” by certain congregants to your employer as a ploy to have you ousted.
- Being pushed to publish your obstetrician’s prescribed bedrest along with private medical information so congregants would understand why you weren’t at your desk every afternoon and then facing backlash when you put your foot down and said, “Absolutely not.”
- Being totally ignored and relegated to “babysitting” instead of being treated as an equal member of the ministerial staff - invited to the table and respected and heard.
- Being told your Capri dress pants and flats were inappropriate for worship at The XYZ Church.
- Being told you couldn’t fill a seat on a national group’s committee because your pregnancy may cause you to miss meetings.
- Having a weekly blog slot from a Baptist media group given to you and then taken away with the explanation, “Maybe you should just have a mommy blog.”
- Having many issues that you bring up for debate with staff being dismissed due to your “oversensitivity” and “unwillingness to go with the flow,” rather than your passion, perspective or expertise in that area.

These things happened in over five churches across almost two decades in church

work, which I began long before attending seminary.

If I seem angry, I am. If I seem hurt, I am. This was my calling as much as it was any other ministers.

Time hasn't healed my wounds; instead, my wounds have been reopened because now I'm old enough to recognize how very wrong I was treated and how few people stood up for me or even acknowledged my pain (made worse by the comments like, "At least the church is doing x, y or z.")

I feel I wear a scarlet letter; I've been labeled "troublemaker" for speaking out about the huge inequities that women ministers (and LGBTQIA ministers) still face.

To be very clear, I do not set out to make trouble; I set out with an expectation of equality.

And when I'm faced with inequality, disrespect and abuse, I will not stay silent. Change isn't made unless some of us speak out against the injustice.

All women aren't welcome in our churches, but compliant ones are allowed to stay.