

MARTHA STEARNS MARSHALL

Baptist Women in Ministry Celebrates the Gifts of Preaching Women



Lauren Colwell, associate minister for spiritual formation and families at First Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia, preached (with a translator) at Iglesia Bautista Genesaret in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba, in February 2010.

Beginning in 2007, Baptist Women in Ministry invited Baptist churches to participate in Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching by having a woman preach during the month of February. This annual event has been a deeply significant source of joy and discovery for many churches as they have celebrated the giftedness of women. This annual preaching month is named for Martha Stearns Marshall, an eighteenth-century Separate Baptist woman.

Separate Baptists emphasized evangelistic preaching, boisterous worship services, and emotional conversion experiences. They were also known for a greater openness to women's leadership, and some Separate

Baptist women served as deaconesses and elders. Others preached and prayed in public worship. The best-known Separate Baptist woman is Martha Stearns Marshall.

Along with her husband, Daniel, Martha converted to Christianity during the First Great Awakening. The couple eventually migrated from New England to Virginia, where they were introduced to Baptist beliefs. Concluding that scripture taught believer's baptism, they were soon baptized and joined a Baptist church, and Daniel was licensed to preach. But both Marshalls were preachers, and Martha's zeal apparently equaled that of her husband. In 1755, the Marshalls, along with Martha's brother Shubal Stearns and his small congregation in Virginia, moved to North Carolina. The group settled at Sandy Creek and established a Baptist church, which became the most influential Separate Baptist church in the South, and Martha often stood alongside Shubal to preach at church meetings. A few years later, the Marshalls moved to nearby Abbott's Creek and founded a new church, and in 1771, they moved to Columbia County, Georgia, where they established in Kiokee the first missionary Baptist church in Georgia.

In all these churches, Martha provided excellent leadership, and in 1810, Virginia Baptist historian Robert Semple wrote: "Mr. Marshall had a rare felicity of finding in this lady a Priscilla, a helper in the gospel. In fact, it should not be concealed that his extraordinary success in the ministry is ascribable in no small degree to Mrs. Marshall's unwearied, and zealous co-operation. Without the shadow of a usurped authority over the other sex, Mrs. Marshall, being a lady of good sense, singular piety, and surprising elocution, has, in countless instances melted a whole concourse into tears by her prayers and exhortations!"

Baptist Women in Ministry invites you to remember and honor Martha Stearns Marshall by celebrating the giftedness of the woman who proclaims the good news from your pulpit today.

Baptist Women in Ministry seeks to be a catalyst in Baptist life, drawing together women and men in partnership with God, to illuminate, advocate, and nurture the gifts and graces of women. For more information about the work of Baptist Women in Ministry and about how to partner with us in supporting and encouraging women ministers, visit www.bwim.info.

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