

"Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God."

The recent actions of the Southern Baptist Convention regarding women will only increase regressive repression in the churches that stubbornly support discrimination against all women. However, we can hope that their repression will ultimately change for the better, as freedom and equality are irresistible to the human spirit created in God's image.

Nevertheless, the spiritual choices made by women of all ages today may directly impact vocational options for generations to come, and so I'd like to offer the following steps to those women and girls who may be discerning a call to ministry:

1. If you feel called by God to ministry of any kind, no matter your age or circumstance, seek out a church that will support you and encourage you to pursue your calling. You can find a list of **Cooperative Baptist Fellowship** churches on their website (<https://cbf.net>) to find a congregation in your area that supports women in leadership and pastoral roles. You may find it necessary to connect with an inclusive church virtually or even consider another denomination. It may take courage to leave a church you know well, but finding a congregation who can accompany you on this journey is crucial.
2. Whether or not you can find a supportive congregation near you, contact **Baptist Women in Ministry** (<https://bwim.info/>) for help in locating mentors, educational materials, and helpful conferences.
3. Progressive seminaries are key places to find inspiration and support. Be sure the seminary's practice, curriculum, theology, and faculty are in full support of women's ordination and full pastoral inclusion. Search for a clear inclusion statement on the seminary's website, and if possible visit personally with a woman currently attending that institution to be sure it will fully embrace your call,
4. If you wish to pursue ordination, most CBF churches can help you find a path. Meet with the pastor to discuss the church's ordination policy. Most of these churches will be able to guide you through the process of discernment. Keep searching until you find the right one.

The call to pastoral ministry begins with a personal relationship with God but is sustained by a relationship with other supportive Christians. Visit **Fletcher Seminary's** website (fletcherseminary.org) for online and affordable seminary options and spiritual support. You are not alone.

Rev. Stephanie Nash

Fletcher Seminary Board of Trustees Chair