

# nurturing the call

by Seth Hix, CBFNC Church Engagement Coordinator

One of the best parts of my job at CBFNC is getting to know the exceptional clergy across our state. I count it an absolute privilege to sit across the table from ministers as they share their faith story and how God has led them through their vocational journey. Amidst the inevitable doubts and struggles of discernment, I always catch a glimpse of God's assuring presence encased in the steadfast faith of our ministers. It is a real gift to hear about the personal and professional journey that has led a particular minister to a particular congregation. These inspiring stories give me great hope for the future of God's church in North Carolina.

During a recent conversation with an experienced CBFNC female associate minister, I was struck by a statement she made. She shared that she has always felt called to be a senior pastor. Yet, until recently, she had never submitted her resume for a Senior Pastor position. Her newfound motivation stemmed primarily from reading the names of so many women in the "Ministers on the Move" section of *The Gathering* magazine. She was encouraged by how many women were answering God's call, and how many CBFNC congregations were hiring them.

Her statement caught me off guard. On one hand, I was proud of CBFNC. On the other hand, I was uncomfortably aware of the tangible inequality that exists in vocational ministry. First, this minister had been forced to hide her true calling simply because she was a woman. I was reminded anew of the remarkable self-confidence and courage women in CBF life must possess in order to pursue their God-given vocational calling. Second, I realized the importance of community in nurturing a call to vocational ministry. No one does ministry alone or in a vacuum. We all need the support of a faith community (congregational or personal) to live into our calling. Part of CBFNC's role is to create an environment in which all people feel empowered to share their vocational calling.

This conversation caused me to look more closely at how many of our churches have recently called women into ministry positions. As it turns out, her perception was correct. In two of the past three years, 40% of ministerial positions filled in CBFNC congregations have been filled by women.

Perhaps there was a time in our history when 40% of ministerial hires in CBFNC congregations would have been shockingly high. I give thanks that today is not that day! While there are some Baptists across our state who are proud of the journey that has led us to 40%, I am also glad that there are people reading this article who are disappointed in how low that number is! I hope and believe that this number will continue to increase in the days ahead.



Here's why:

As ministry paradigms shift, more congregations are open to considering women for senior pastor positions. In fact, congregations who have recently called women as Senior Pastors include First, Huntersville; First, Hamlet; Providence, Hendersonville; Greenwood Forest, Cary; West Side, Winston-Salem; and First, Winston-Salem. Nobles Chapel, Sims, recently called a husband and wife as co-pastors.

The enrollment at many of our CBFNC partner divinity schools and seminaries shows more than half of the student population is female. It is not uncommon to walk into a seminary classroom and see more women than men. God is undoubtedly calling women into vocational ministry!

There has been a dramatic increase in resources and visibility of women in ministry. This is, in large part, due to the outstanding work of organizations such as BWIM and their state organization here in NC. Events like *Martha Sterns Marshall Month of Preaching* have encouraged hundreds of congregations to invite women fill pulpits for the past 10 years. While these congregations are not all in NC, the young women in the pews of those out-of-state congregations often end up in one of our partner divinity schools.

Within many of our partner congregations, we have had a generation of young people grow up with women in vocational ministry positions. So, for many of our young people, women in ministry is a cultural norm. This certainly contributes to the inspiration of more young women who will listen for and answer God's call into ministry.

I give thanks to God for the significant impact women ministers have made in my life. And I hope that as CBFNC looks toward the next 25 years of ministry, we will continue to find new ways to encourage and cultivate God's call in the lives women across our state.