

ABSTRACT

Jezebel or Servant of God?: How Julie Pennington-Russell
Became the First Female Pastor in Texas

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In 1998 Calvary Baptist Church, in Waco, Texas, appointed Julie Pennington-Russell: the first female Baptist pastor in Texas. This thesis will show the dynamic relationship between the conservative and moderate Baptist groups in Waco, and how each group responded to the question of whether women should be allowed in the pastorate. Many moderate Baptists in Waco came from the local Baylor University, which had a strong influence on the community.

The appointment of the first female Baptist pastor in Texas came at a time when the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was fully in control by fundamentalist leaders, who were against women pastors. The SBC had been controlled by moderates until the late 1970s when fundamentalist Baptists had taken control of the Convention. Pennington-Russell's

appointment shows that not all Baptists were conservative or agreed with the SBC's interpretation of women in ministry.

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Became the First Female Pastor in Texas

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of

Master of Arts

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Accepted by the Graduate School
August 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the past year and a half that this master's thesis has been in the making, there have been many wonderful and influential people that have given there support.

First, I would like to thank Dr. Kellison for guiding me through this process and staying enthusiastic every time we discussed new research. She helped me stay focused and grounded throughout the year when I would begin to feel overwhelmed or frustrated.

I would also like to thank Dr. Charlton and Dr. Dowd for serving on my committee. Dr. Charlton led me to this topic and has been a great influence to me throughout graduate school, and a confidence boost when my research would seemingly come to a dead end. Dr. Dowd was able to point out aspects of Baptist churches that I often overlooked.

The biggest contributors to this thesis, however, have been the members of Calvary. Without their support, generosity, and enthusiasm, this project would never have left the ground. I especially want to thank all the interviewees who sat for recorded interviews: Pat and D.G. Melton; Helen and Alva Stem; Tom Purdy; David Lintz; Sharon

Hoffman; and Ken Massey. There were many more that contributed information in informal settings, such as Jonathan Grant, Kessa Payne, Nonie Townsend, Calvary supporter Daniel Vestal, and many, many more.

And of course, I would like to thank Julie Pennington-Russell for allowing me dive into her life and snoop around. Even with her busy schedule once she moved to Georgia last summer, she graciously gave her time for a phone interview and supported my research of her.

CHAPTER ONE

Baptist History in America

History of the Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention has had an important and influential part in the history of Protestant denominations, becoming the largest of all Protestant denominations in the United States toward the end of the twentieth century. Baptists began in seventeenth century England as a faction that rejected baptizing infants and instead practiced adult baptism since they believed that infants were not capable of making the spiritual decision on their own, an idea that seemed radical at the time.¹ The early group was led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, who moved their followers of just over forty to Holland to escape persecution in England, and in 1609 Smyth baptized himself and the other believers.² They did not form major theological beliefs that deviated from other Protestant

¹Walter B. Shurden, *Not A Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 12.

²G. Keith Parker, *Baptists in Europe: History and Confessions of Faith* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 31.

groups, but rather for the freedom to study the Bible and reflect on the readings.³

In America, Baptists were always divided over theological issues and church structure. The beginnings of Baptists in America started with the General Baptists that believed in free will, and the Particular Baptists that believed in predestination, but both were still able to call themselves Baptists.⁴ Baptist groups continued to divide and form new groups over disputes. Walter Shurden comments, "If religious controversy is an index of how much people care, then Baptists care more than any other group in the world."⁵

Another major divide of American Baptists in the South came in the last half of the twentieth century in the Southern Baptist Convention. The birth of the Southern Baptist Convention took place in 1845 and stemmed from an argument with Northern Baptists over whether slaveholders were biblically allowed to be missionaries; a social issue

³Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 1993), 2.

⁴Ibid., 2.

⁵Quoted in Shurden, *Not A Silent People*, 7.

rather than a theological issue.⁶ Nancy Ammerman points out that this is in part because, "The Baptist focus on the individual and on local organizations meant that what was established was more a religious culture than a religious community, an ethos more than an institutional structure."⁷ Keeping their religious and social culture was more important to Northern and Southern Baptists than trying to find theological middle ground. And with Baptists believing in the autonomy of individual churches and not having a ruling power to take sides or make decisions, arguments tended to divide even the most devout Baptists.

Even though the Southern Baptist Convention is a religious organization that tries to distinguish itself from worldly behaviors, it is run as any business would be. The current structure of the convention began to take shape in 1917, when the Executive Committee was formed to organize convention meetings and to solve random problems that did not fit under any other group's job descriptions.⁸

⁶David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, The New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996), 1.

⁷Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 30.

⁸*Ibid.*, 44.

The Executive Committee became a fundraising and budgeting group for the Convention after the committee recommended the Cooperative Program, a plan for members to tithe monthly to their churches, who in turn would give funds to their state convention, who would then give to the SBC.⁹ This made the budget for the SBC more reliable and constant so that the Executive Committee could allocate funds more accurately.¹⁰

In 1931, the debate within the SBC changed from how to structure the Convention to who should be allowed to vote at the SBC's annual meetings. Until then, there had not been specific guidelines regarding what groups could send messengers to vote. Mission societies and associations were both allowed to send messengers, but this changed when it was decided that only churches could send messengers. The number the churches could send was determined by the monetary amount the churches sent to the Convention. The maximum a single church could send to the Convention were ten messengers.¹¹ For every \$250 a church sent to the

⁹Ammerman, 44.

¹⁰Ibid., 45.

¹¹Ibid., 45-46.

Convention a church could send one messenger; this later was amended to one messenger for every 250 church members.¹²

In the midst of these structural debates over how to improve the Convention, Southern Baptists were greatly influenced by their desire to preserve their southern culture, and kept this desire in the back of their minds as they discussed ways to resolve Convention issues. When the 1960s brought social change across the country, Southern Baptists became increasingly conservative in the 1970s in reaction to the changes happening within the American culture.¹³

*The Fundamentalist Transition to a New SBC*¹⁴

In the 1920s a debate over evolution began to separate biblical inerrantists, or those that believe there is only one way to understand the Bible, from scientific thinkers. Fundamentalism became a common-place term for conservatives on the religious right who believed in biblical inerrancy and premillennialism, and many Southern Baptists were

¹²Ibid., 46.

¹³David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 5.

¹⁴Bill J. Leonard also uses the term "New SBC" in his book *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990); 176-177.

beginning to have fundamentalists leanings. They wanted to separate themselves from worldly behaviors and materialism, while at the same time converting as many people as possible to their beliefs. Most fundamentalists would also be labeled as evangelicals, although not all evangelicals are fundamentalists. Since fundamentalists did not have much influence within the SBC or any other Protestant denomination, they began to spread their message through radio shows, colleges, foreign missions, and publications in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁵

Fundamentalists believed that there was only one true interpretation of the Bible and that people who believed otherwise were heretics, while moderates believed there was room for debate, and that debate was a healthy way to grow spiritually. With such vastly differing opinions among Baptists over who should be in control, it is not surprising that different groups have formed under the Baptist name.

Fundamentalists came in and out of the public eye since their formation in the 1920s, but for the most part were left out of leadership positions within the SBC and

¹⁵Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 7.

state conventions in the 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁶ They resurfaced with renewed zeal at the end of the 1960s and the 1970s, after the Supreme Court rulings that school-led prayers were unconstitutional.¹⁷ This fear of secularization made some fundamentalists decide that they must change society through religion, and that by placing fundamentalists in positions of power within different organizations they would have more influence overall.

Control of the Southern Baptist Convention became the goal for many fundamentalist Baptists, and soon it was obvious that they had intentions of replacing the key leaders of the Convention in order to spread their views to a large group. This almost seems like an unlikely choice of organizations since the SBC did not have control over individual congregations due to the autonomy of Baptist churches, but fundamentalists believed that the SBC could be an influence of great proportion. In 1968 they celebrated a huge victory when W. A. Criswell, a vocal Dallas fundamentalist, was elected president of the SBC.¹⁸ This was the beginning of the transition of power from

¹⁶Ammerman, 171.

¹⁷Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 8.

¹⁸Ibid., 9.

moderates to fundamentalists that was to occur within the SBC, a shift so drastic it seemed to become a new Convention altogether.

At the SBC's 1979 annual meeting, fundamentalists came out in droves to cast their votes to elect other fundamentalists to key positions within the administration of the SBC, and re-elected those that were already in place.¹⁹ From 1979 on, every president elected to the SBC has been a fundamentalist.²⁰ J. R. Huddlestun, a pastor of a church that left the SBC in 2002, said that after fundamentalists were in control of the SBC, the voting process changed drastically.

Past presidents of the Convention and often other messengers were allowed to sit on the speaker's platform and speak from the pulpit microphone. When the fundamentalists were elected president, this practice was stopped and the pulpit microphone controlled. Other microphones were also managed—especially women who said their audience microphones were turned off before they could speak or make a point. I asked why the fundamentalists seemed to sit on the main floor where TV cameras gave the appearance of overwhelming votes and was told that fundamentalist pastors and their congregations were allowed to enter the main seating area one hour before the doors were opened for the regular messengers. Some families registered children as young as five years to get voting ballots. The clerk informed us at one

¹⁹Leonard, 136-7.

²⁰Ibid., 169.

convention that up to ten thousand more votes were made on Thursday than the number present.²¹

Moderates felt that fundamentalists were trying to take away the core beliefs of Baptists: beliefs such as the autonomy of individual churches and the priesthood of the believer. With compromise out of the question for either group, a battle for control of the SBC emerged, with moderates admitting defeat after Daniel Vestal lost to fundamentalist Morris Chapman in 1990.²² While fundamentalists had for the most part been able to remain in the SBC when it was under the moderates' control, moderates concluded that they had no place within a fundamentalist controlled convention, and many left the SBC in the early 1990s.

Many Baptist universities and seminaries became pawns in the struggle for control of the SBC. Fundamentalists believed that these schools needed to hire only Baptist professors that would teach biblical inerrancy, and those that did not believe in inerrancy should not be allowed to teach at Baptist schools. This would mean that many

²¹Quoted in Carl L. Kell, *Exiled: Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006); 140.

²²Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 100-103.

professors would forfeit their jobs since highly educated members of the SBC tended to be more moderate.²³

During the 1980s and 1990s, colleges and universities began to fear fundamentalist takeovers, and several new Baptist seminaries were created as alternatives to the fundamentalist Southern Baptist seminaries. One of the most bitter battles over control of Baptist schools involved Baylor University, the largest Baptist university in the world.²⁴ Fundamentalists had been attacking Baylor for years for teaching evolution, and many fundamentalist leaders felt it was their Christian duty to obtain control of the university in order to prevent such liberal ideas to spread to young students. In 1981, Herbert H. Reynolds, a vocal moderate Baptist, became president of Baylor and decided to implement drastic changes for the university to keep the fundamentalists from taking control.²⁵

At that time the state convention, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), had a large amount of influence over the university and directly elected forty-eight

²³David B. Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 2.

²⁴Baylor University Mission Statement, can be viewed at <http://www.baylor.edu/about/index.php?id=48040>.

²⁵Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 145-148.

trustees to Baylor's board. The BGCT was the largest Baptist state convention, with nearly three million members, and provided 13 percent of the SBC's revenue, which made it a prize to be fought for on both sides of the fundamentalist debate.²⁶ Reynolds feared the BGCT would soon be controlled by fundamentalists and took preventative measures by reducing the convention's power over the university. He laid out a plan to decrease the number from forty-eight trustees to twenty-four regents, and only a quarter of those would be chosen by the BGCT with the rest chosen by the existing regents. This outraged fundamentalists and strained ties with the BGCT, which contributed millions of dollars annually to the university.²⁷ In 2000, the BGCT voted to withhold \$5 million from seminaries and agencies that the SBC controlled or ran.²⁸

The same year Reynolds was making changes to the trustee system, Baylor decided to make plans for the creation of the George W. Truett Seminary to counter the fact that several other seminaries around the country now

²⁶Jeffery L. Sheler, "In Texas, a battle for the Baptists' soul- Moderates and conservatives fight for control," *U.S. News and World Report*, 13 November 2000.

²⁷Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 148-9.

²⁸Sheler, 13 November 2000.

had fundamentalist boards of trustees in control.²⁹

Reynolds's fear of fundamentalist control, even though many saw it as unwarranted since fundamentalists never came in control of the BGCT, and the state convention decided to reject the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 1998 which stated women should submit to their husbands.³⁰ Reynolds's actions strained the relations of Baylor and the BGCT and caused it to be labeled "liberal" by some Baptists. It also was a major reason that the BGCT held its largest annual meeting ever recorded in Waco in 1998, just after the updated *Baptist Faith and Message* was released. The messengers were to vote on whether or not they accepted the new regent system for Baylor, and it passed in a simple majority.³¹ Russell Dilday also won the BGCT's presidential election that year. Dilday had been forced to resign from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1994 for being

²⁹Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 147.

³⁰Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 223.

³¹*Ibid.*, 150-1.

too moderate, but was hired by Truett Seminary, once again tying the BGCT to Waco and Baylor.³²

Women Within SBC and Their Changing Roles

The Southern Baptist Convention changed dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century by defining how Baptists should interpret the Bible and making debate within the SBC be seen as disloyalty, which caused the SBC to emerge as an entirely new Convention. With the New SBC now under fundamentalist control, there was very little room for women to lead within either the organization or in individual churches. The *Baptist Faith and Message*, a statement of beliefs that Baptists could choose to adopt, was revised in 1998 to state that women are seen as equal to men, but should submit to their husbands. In 2000, this document was revised once more to make a direct statement against women pastors.³³ Many moderate Baptists felt secluded within the new SBC, and looked to form a new fellowship of like-minded thinkers who did not have to conform to the fundamentalist agenda. Most mainline Protestant denominations had begun incorporating women into

³²Jim Jones, "Texas Baptists to vote on submission resolution- Moderate-led group re-elects Dilday as president," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 10 November 1998.

³³Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 81-84.

leadership positions during the second half of the twentieth century, yet the SBC steadfastly refused women the right to have positions of power over men.³⁴

Women had not always been excluded from pastoring. Druecillar Fordham became pastor of Christ Temple Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, in 1963, which later joined the regional Southern Baptist association.³⁵ In 1964, Addie Davis became the first woman to be ordained by a Southern Baptist church in the South, although she could not find a southern church to pastor and had to move to Vermont.³⁶ Davis spurred many more women in the South to also seek ordination over the next several years, causing panic to many within the SBC.³⁷

In Kansas City in 1984, an SBC resolution passed that denied support by the SBC of women pastors since the apostle Paul says they were responsible for the fall of man.³⁸ It should be noted that resolutions, like the *Baptist Faith and Message*, did not hold any authority and

³⁴Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, xi.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 172.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 175.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 172-3.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 79.

were only written to point out a concern of the SBC.³⁹ The fundamentalists saw women in ministry as a direct defiance against the Bible and God, and felt they had no other choice but to condemn the action since they believed in only one way to interpret the Bible. The Convention had restricted women to such an extent that David Morgan commented, "The only time the new leaders of the Convention turned their attention to women, it was to place restrictions on them."⁴⁰ Moderates believed it was a fear of changing southern culture that prompted these resolutions to keep women from usurping a patriarchal way of life.⁴¹

Nor had women always been discouraged from involvement with Baptist associations. In the early nineteenth century, when Baptists were beginning to meet nationally as the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions--simply known as the Triennial Convention--most mission societies were for women, although they sent only male

³⁹Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolutions," <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/default.asp> [accessed 5 February 2007].

⁴⁰Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 80.

⁴¹Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979); 112.

members to represent them at the Triennial Convention.⁴² These mission societies did send money to the Triennial Convention, however, and women were sent throughout the world as missionaries to preach and convert people to Christianity.⁴³

Throughout nearly all of the SBC's history women have been allowed to register as messengers for state conventions, with some even giving reports to the larger audiences, and female messengers were allowed at the SBC's national conventions after 1918.⁴⁴ Messengers acted as representatives of local churches, and voted on behalf of their churches.⁴⁵ In 1929, Mrs. W. J. Cox was the first woman to address the Convention to report on the Woman's Missionary Union, the first major report to be given by a woman at the Convention.⁴⁶ Today, the SBC's website states in article three, point four, of their constitution, "Each messenger shall be a member of the church by which he is

⁴²Ammerman, 27.

⁴³McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life*, 81-84.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 107-112.

⁴⁵C. Kirk Hadaway, "Will the Real Southern Baptist Please Stand Up: Methodological Problems in Surveying Southern Baptist Congregations and Members," *Review of Religious Research*, 31,2 (December 1989); 149-150.

⁴⁶McBeth, 119.

appointed."⁴⁷ Nowhere does it say that messengers must be male, and gender neutral terms are used throughout except in point four.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, women were discouraged from teaching in Southern Baptist seminaries although women were allowed to attend these seminaries.⁴⁸ Even in progressive SBC seminaries of the time, such as the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, the faculty was almost completely made up of men, and female students often felt that while the faculty was supportive women in ministry, they were ignorant of gender issues. Many female students even believed that they had been sexually harassed while attending the seminary.⁴⁹

While many women felt excluded from the Convention, there were also many fundamentalist women that supported the SBC's decision to restrict women's roles and submit to their husbands. There were two women on the committee to the 1998 amendment, and many women supported the amendment

⁴⁷The Southern Baptist Convention, "Constitution", <http://www.sbc.net/redirect.asp?url=http://www.sbcannualmeeting.net/sbc06/messenger.asp> [accessed 5 February 2007]. Italics added.

⁴⁸Ibid., 184.

⁴⁹Hankins, 202.

believing they should submit to their husbands' decisions.⁵⁰ Fundamentalist Paige Patterson's wife Dorothy taught women's studies at Southwestern Theological Seminary, but remained a fundamentalist who believed that wives should submit to their husbands.⁵¹ She was just one of many wives who did not see their submission as an issue since God demanded it.

The Creation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Once the Southern Baptist Convention had completed its transition from moderate to fundamentalist control, several moderates felt the need to form their own group since they no longer had a say in the New SBC. David Vestal and other moderate Baptists met in Atlanta in 1990 to discuss their future. This meeting led to a decision to meet again the next year, but until then they would refer to themselves simply as "The Fellowship".⁵² The next year the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was formed. The CBF began by sending money to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, affiliated with part of the SBC, but refused to send funds

⁵⁰Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 82.

⁵¹Barry Hankins, *Oral Memoirs of Dorothy Patterson* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2003).

⁵²Ammerman, x.

to the SBC's Executive Committee or to Southern Seminary. As the CBF became more involved in foreign missions they sent less and less money to SBC organizations, so that by 1994 less than ten percent of CBF's funds were going to the SBC.⁵³ Many churches began refusing to give funds to the SBC's Executive Committee, and instead gave to the CBF.⁵⁴

The CBF decided that they would not allow resolutions on social issues since it was social issues that had separated them from the SBC.⁵⁵ Daniel Vestal, one of the founders of the CBF, was specific in stating that there would not be a submission statement from the CBF since they did not believe that both man and woman could be equal in a marriage if one had to submit to the other without question.⁵⁶ The CBF allows women to preach and tries to keep the numbers of men and women at meetings equal, although this has been more difficult than expected and usually men are in the majority.⁵⁷

Many other new moderate Baptist groups were also formed during this time, and as Nancy Tatom Ammerman notes,

⁵³Ammerman, xi.

⁵⁴Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 171.

⁵⁵Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 222.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 222-223.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 203.

none of these organizations included the word "Southern" in their names, possibly to distance themselves from the SBC.⁵⁸ Several, like the Alliance of Baptists, were far more progressive than the CBF, and were quick to point out when they were in direct opposition to the views of the SBC.⁵⁹ Stan Hastey, who was then executive director of the Alliance of Baptists, called the fundamentalists' belief in inerrancy "nothing short of idolatrous" which makes women's submission to men absolutely wrong.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The Southern Baptist Convention underwent major changes in the second half of the twentieth century, and the consequences of those changes may still not be seen for years to come. For some moderates, the changes were too far from what they believed to be the basics of Baptist beliefs. Conservatives and fundamentalists had felt more at home in the New SBC, embracing the call to reform society. They saw how other Protestant denominations slowed their growth after becoming more liberal, like the decline in the Methodist Church, and saw that as a sign

⁵⁸Ammerman, xii.

⁵⁹Hankins, 222.

⁶⁰Quoted in Hankins, 222.

that fundamentalism was the right way.⁶¹ Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke show that denominations that actively recruit members, like evangelical Southern Baptists, usually see much more rapid growth than their moderate and liberal counterparts.⁶² The fundamentalists' resolve to overcome the moderate sect only strengthened their religious fervor. As David Stricklin humorously states, "If the progressives had not existed, one could almost imagine that the fundamentalists would have needed to invent them."⁶³

For women who felt called to preach after the 1984 resolution and 1998 revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, there was little room for them within the New SBC, and they were forced to leave if they chose to pursue their callings. Southern Baptist Women in Ministry (SBWIM) was created in 1983 to encourage women in ministry, but disassociated themselves from the SBC ten years later once fundamentalists had clearly become in control.⁶⁴ Many churches also left the SBC and joined the newly formed

⁶¹Leonard, 179.

⁶²Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); 151-154.

⁶³Quoted in Stricklin, 163.

⁶⁴Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 180-181.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, while some men and women left their churches and joined different Christian denominations altogether.

Even with the controversy and disagreements that abound in Baptist history, most Baptists continue to be proud of their heritage and see disputes as healthy for their growth. While many have wished that the Southern Baptist Convention had not split, the controversy did increase the discussion among Baptists and non-Baptists alike. As an evangelical denomination, having people discussing the issues that are important to them is positive since it helps spread their Christian principles. Baptists know that the split in the twentieth century is not the first nor the last debate that they will have, but they also know it will not destroy their faith, and that Baptists can prevail through almost any situation.

CHAPTER TWO

The History of Calvary Baptist Church

By the end of the twentieth century, Calvary Baptist Church of Waco, Texas, had become a moderate Baptist church. Once the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) had formed in 1990, Calvary began to send more money to the CBF than to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), as many other moderate Baptist churches were also doing.¹ The final thrust that isolated this church from the SBC came in 1998, when Calvary made Baptist history in Texas.²

Calvary's history shows that it was a church that did not rock the boat often. Calvary was formed in 1928 by the joining of two struggling congregations, Provident Heights

¹David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, The New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991*, Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996, 171-177.

²This thesis will only look at the white Baptist churches, since they are more likely to align with national and state Baptist conventions according to James R. Shortridge, "Patterns of Religion in the United States," *Geographical Review* 66, 4 (October 1976): 421. This source gives geographical locations of Protestant religions, but does not include black denominations since they do not report to a national body. Charles W. Deweese also does not include black Baptist churches in his list of Baptist churches that allow female deacons in *Women Deacons and Deaconesses: 400 Years of Baptist Service* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 227.

and Brooks Avenue Baptist Churches. Both of those churches had begun in 1909, but by 1928 were finding it difficult to stay afloat on their own. Provident Heights was a small church with a large debt of \$25,000 after erecting a new church building. Brooks Avenue was debt-free, but its membership had become stagnant and needed revival.

Brooks Avenue's history, although short, foreshadowed Calvary's dynamic history. Pastor G. R. Chandler led the growing church, whose membership reached 675, and he oversaw several building projects. In 1926, just two years before joining with Provident Heights, a group of dissenters from Turner Street Baptist Church joined Brooks Avenue. Turner Street had been started by the famed George W. Truett, the moderate Baptist from Dallas, and for whom Baylor's seminary would be named. The dissenters possibly left over an argument that began in 1920 during Prohibition about whether to use grape juice or wine for the Lord's Supper, an issue which the members eventually voted to leave to the decision of the pastor. The pastor at the time, R. E Bass, led the church until 1926.³

³Gary Tapley, *Westwood Homecoming: May 4, 2003: celebrating 135 years of serving the Lord as East Waco Baptist Church, Turner Street Baptist Church, Westwood Baptist Church, Woodway, Texas: Westwood Baptist Church, 2003, History 12 and History 26.*

Provident Heights had a solid membership of 375, but debt amounting to \$25,000, which was the main reason why they were looking to merge with another church. Brooks Avenue had 625 members and no debt, but were in need of a new building, which Provident Heights had. The twenty-six deacons from the two churches met to discuss a potential union, and decided on the name Calvary Baptist Church at the recommendation of A. J. Sligh. The name became official in a later vote by the church members.⁴

In February of 1928, Brooks Avenue and Provident Heights celebrated their joining with characteristic Baptist celebratory festivities: a two-week-long revival, with the pastors of each of the original churches taking turns preaching. The Provident Heights building at 18th and Bosque became the new church's headquarters, drawing in members of the community, such as the family of the young Alva Stem who lived just one block away. At the time, the area was sparsely populated, but as the city developed the church found itself in the center of urban Waco.

A pulpit committee was formed on 8 February 1928, comprised of nineteen members to search for the first

⁴"Historical Highlights of Calvary Baptist Church," *Calvary Baptist Church*, Thirty-fifth Anniversary Edition, church bulletin, Waco, Texas: 3 February 1963.

pastor of the new church. The committee surprisingly included six women.⁵ The former pastors of Brooks Avenue and Provident Heights, W. T. Rouse and W. T. Turner, were to retire at the announcement of the new pastor. It was announced that Calvary's first pastor would be Dr. A. J. Holt from Mart, Texas, a small town in McLennan County. Holt had graduated from Baylor University in Waco, and went on to Southwestern Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. Holt served as senior pastor for thirty years, longer than any other pastor would serve Calvary. In 1953, just a few years before his retirement, Baylor awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity.⁶

In the first year of the church's existence, the annual budget totaled \$19,985, and it grew to \$100,000 by 1954 and \$200,000 by 1978. Today, the annual budget is at \$682,037.51.⁷ Tithing did not begin at Calvary until 1935, the same time the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee announced the change. The church began tithing

⁵F. D. Coppin, "To Be Remembered," *Calvary Baptist Church*, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, Waco, Texas: 25 January 1978.

⁶*Calvary Baptist Church*, church bulletin, Waco, Texas: 3 February 1963.

⁷Nonie Townsend, private interview with author, 20 February 2008.

with a three-month trial period before fully committing to the plan.

During Holt's thirty year tenure as Calvary's senior pastor, church membership grew from 1,000 to 2,146. Perhaps this was due to the aggressive nature of the deacons to keep the church pews filled: In 1937 the deacons went door-to-door to the homes of members "'negligent' in church attendance."⁸ To accommodate the growing church attendance, several building improvements were needed: In 1948, Calvary became the first air-conditioned church in Waco, and in 1955 all of the attached buildings became air-conditioned. In December of 1952, construction on a new sanctuary began, which is the current sanctuary still in use today. In September 1977, lightning split the top of the tower causing \$47,000 in damages, and the tower was struck twice in 1991, with the second time sending portions of the tower through the sanctuary ceiling.⁹

⁸David Lintz, "The Calvary Baptist Church Story", typed notes given to author by Lintz.

⁹David Lintz, "A Short History of the Buildings and Grounds at Calvary Baptist Church," typed notes given to author by Lintz.

Dr. Holt retired in 1958, when he became associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Waco.¹⁰ His predecessor, Dr. Gerald T. Smith, from Crossett, Arkansas, brought with him a wife and three daughters. By all accounts, Dr. Smith was a perfect match for the church. A graduate with honors from Oklahoma Baptist University, Smith went on to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisiana, and had also served as a naval chaplain in World War II.¹¹ During his short time at Calvary, the church purchased the activity center that was located across the street from the main church building, and several other positive building improvements were made.¹²

Just two years after being appointed Calvary's senior pastor, however, Smith was asked to resign after accusations of child molestation within the church.¹³ On March 25, 1960, Smith wrote what was to be his last letter

¹⁰*Calvary Baptist Church, Thirty-fifth Anniversary Edition, church bulletin, "Historical Highlights of Calvary Baptist Church," Waco, Texas: 3 February 1963.*

¹¹*Waco Tribune-Herald, 7 September 1958.*

¹²David Lintz, interview with author, Waco, Texas, 5 December 2007, and in David Lintz, "A Short History of the Buildings and Grounds at Calvary Baptist Church," typed notes given to author from Lintz. Additions included the purchase of a house for youth, and air-conditioning the nursery.

¹³*Ibid.*

in the monthly church bulletin, "From the Pastor's Study," in the *Calvary Baptist News*, with no hint of an early departure. On April 8, which celebrated Youth Week, highlights of Youth Week were discussed on the first page without mention of Smith's sudden departure, along with college student Naymond Keathley taking the role of pastor for the week. Even nearly fifty years after the incident, it is complicated to find members who are willing to talk about Smith. With members still finding it difficult to discuss the scandal, it is easy to see how it was covered up and kept from the public eye.

On May 15, 1960, with Smith barely out the door, Hubert T. Yount was called to become Calvary's third pastor and he began preaching at the church on June 19.¹⁴ A Baylor graduate, Yount returned to Waco after attending Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and pastoring churches in Texas and Tennessee. He was active in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, where he served on the Executive Board, and was a moderator of the Waco Baptist Association and Treasurer of the General Ministers' Association. When not involved in Calvary's affairs and the different Baptist

¹⁴*The Calvary Tower*, church bulletin, Waco, Texas: 27 May 1960.

associations he was involved with, he had six children to raise with his wife.¹⁵

The church's attendance slowly began to decline in the years after Yount's departure, with pastors Bill R. Austin from 1969 to 1972, Bob Segrest from 1972 to 1979, and Dr. Larry Nixon from 1979 to 1982. Bob Segrest had family ties to Calvary: his parents and a brother, Philip, were also members of the church. Segrest had been enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and had preached at First Baptist Church in Throckmorton, Texas. Once hired by Calvary, Segrest left his biggest imprint on the physical structure of Calvary's buildings by initiating several building modifications, such as remodeling the sanctuary and making the Fellowship Hall handicap accessible.¹⁶ Just after six years as senior pastor, Segrest moved his family to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he was appointed pastor of Concord Baptist Church.¹⁷

¹⁵*Calvary Baptist Church*, Thirty-fifth Anniversary Edition, church bulletin, "Historical Highlights of Calvary Baptist Church," Waco, Texas, 3 February 1963.

¹⁶*Calvary Baptist Church*, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, church bulletin, "Changes at Calvary Evident in Recent Years," Waco, Texas, 25 January 1978.

¹⁷*The Calvary Tower*, church bulletin, Waco, Texas: 16 May 1979, v. 10, 20.

During Nixon's three years, including his time as interim pastor before he was hired as full-time pastor in 1979, Calvary's membership saw an increase in moderate Baptists joining the Waco church. Nixon was from California, and was a 'fast-paced' preacher who suffered from heart problems. Against his doctor's orders, Nixon accepted Calvary's invitation to become interim and then senior pastor, never slowing his pace.¹⁸ The church began to see attendance increase during his time. He invited famed actress Dale Evans to speak at Calvary about her life as a Christian on 2 November 1980. The church advertised through billboards, radio, television, and newspaper ads, and over 50,000 telephone calls were made to people of the community, resulting in 1,400 people that attended worship service that Sunday, filling the sanctuary, chapel, and fellowship hall.¹⁹ The mayor of Waco even named the day "Dale Evans Day".²⁰ Nixon later moved to Duncanville,

¹⁸David Lintz, interview with author, Waco, Texas, 5 December 2007, and in a letter from Larry Nixon in the *Calvary Tower*, church bulletin, 14 November 1979, v. 11, 43.

¹⁹David Lintz, interview with author, Waco, Texas: 5 December 2007.

²⁰Calvary still has the official proclamation from Mayor David S. Dow, which states the purpose of the honor as, "to welcome her with appreciation and recognition of

Texas, after his retirement and preached for several more years.

Nixon's years were quite a contrast to his successor Jerry M. Clements. Clements was an evangelical who some believed was better suited for traveling tent revivals than as pastor of a moderate Baptist church. Clements was raised in Brownsville, Texas, and attended Dallas Baptist College where he received his Bachelor of Arts in 1984. After attending Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, he was minister to youth at Edgemont Park Baptist Church in Mesquite, Texas, and pastor of First Baptist Church, in Joshua, Texas. Just two years after becoming Calvary's senior pastor, Clements resigned after pressure from an unsatisfied congregation, and accepted a call to pastor Trinity Heights Baptist Church in Carrollton, Texas, a suburb of Dallas.²¹ Helen and Alva Stem, two members who have attended Calvary longer than nearly anyone else and have seen many changes within the

her many contributions of time, energy and talent for the spiritual enrichment of others."

²¹*The Calvary Tower*, church bulletin, Waco, Texas: 24 April 1985, v 19, 17.

church²², commented that Clements would preach facing the choir with his back to the congregation, an act that they did not remember with fondness.

Following Clements as senior pastor in 1986 came Dr. James Bryant Johnson, or Jim, as Johnson was known to the church. A moderate Baptist, Johnson was aware of the conservative movement taking place in the Southern Baptist Convention at the time. In the weekly letter he wrote in *The Calvary Tower* in 1988, Johnson stressed the importance of sending messengers from Calvary to the annual meeting. "This is a pivotal year in the life of our convention," Johnson asserted. "The political takeover movement of the Pressler-Patterson coalition is almost complete. Unless Richard Jackson [a moderate Texas pastor] is elected, our convention will be fully in the control of a small group of well-financed, control-minded pastors."²³ The church was already moving in a decidedly moderate direction by this point, as evident in the fear of fundamentalists coming into power in the SBC. Johnson was well liked by the congregation and began reviving the church once again, but

²²Alva Stem's family attended since Calvary's conception in 1928. Alva was three years old at the time, and has attended Calvary ever since.

²³Quoted in *The Calvary Tower*, Waco, Texas: 8 June 1988, v. 23, 23.

left after four years when his wife, a news anchor at a local television station, took a job with CNN in Atlanta. Succeeding CBF director Daniel Vestal as senior pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in Georgia, Johnson became pastor and began a contemporary worship service.²⁴

Johnson's successor, Ken Massey, was a young, energetic pastor returning to Texas after time as pastor of a Baptist church in Mississippi. It was not until Massey was appointed pastor of Calvary in 1990 that the church began to make major theological changes. Massey had grown up in Beaumont, Texas, from birth through two years of college, until he transferred to Baylor. Here, he made valuable contacts with people that would later bring him to Calvary. After graduating from Baylor, Massey followed his friends to Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, where his original plan was to become a youth minister. It was his time at seminary that made him interested in becoming a pastor, and after receiving his Master's of Divinity in 1984, Massey became the pastor of First Baptist Marks off the Mississippi river, about sixty-five miles from Memphis.

First Baptist Marks in Mississippi was the main church in the county seat, giving Massey a great amount of

²⁴Dunwoody Baptist Church, "A Brief History," 16 August 2004, <http://www.dbc.org/about/article12994c16338.htm> Accessed 11 January 2008.

influence on the community. The church was made up of farming families, and seemed old-fashioned for the time, as though they were living "a hundred years in time."²⁵ For Massey, who was young and progressive, the church was too anachronistic and conflicts were bound to arise. When Massey suggested ordaining female deacons, the idea was flatly refused. What he was able to change was allowing women to lay hands at an ordination with the men, a change he proudly considers a huge leap for the church.²⁶

During his tenure as First Baptist's pastor, Massey learned that one of his children had learning disabilities that could not be addressed in the small Mississippi town, and he sent a plea out to help him find a job in a town where his child's needs could be adequately met. Calvary members that remembered Massey from his years at Baylor began to seriously consider the young pastor in their search to replace Jim Johnson, who also recommended Massey as his replacement. The search committee visited Marks, and then invited Massey to Calvary to meet the congregation and spend a weekend in Waco.

²⁵Quoted from phone interview with Ken Massey, 6 November 2007.

²⁶Ibid.

Calvary's members were comprised of a group of aging traditionalists and a group of young, progressive leaders, but both groups seemed to be in agreement that the church was in need of reviving. Massey was brought to Waco to preach before the church one Sunday, and the next Sunday, 4 October 1990, they voted him as their new pastor. The chairman of Massey's search committee, Mac Lattimore, Calvary's Minister of Education, served as what Massey described as a translator between old and young groups during Jim Johnson's time as pastor and Massey believed Lattimore was critical in helping Johnson move the church forward. Unfortunately, Lattimore died of complications from heart surgery before Massey moved to Waco, leaving Massey to translate on his own.²⁷

Massey's first Sunday was on 11 November 1990, Baylor's homecoming weekend, and he began to make changes in the church almost immediately. An ethics class at Southwestern had made him believe that refusing women from ordination and ministry was a cultural phenomenon, and even if he was wrong he "would rather be wrong including women than I would be excluding them. If someone feels called of God and if they show evidence of spiritual gifts and

²⁷Ken Massey, phone interview with author, 6 November 2007.

abilities I'd rather include them and then apologize later if that happened to be the wrong thing, but I just don't think it is."²⁸

The deacons of the church were a group of elderly men who were very traditional, so the first step Massey took was to change the qualifications of the deacons to gender neutral terms rather than simply stating that men and women were equally qualified. The young adults were ready for this change, and after much debate the changes were made and the language was altered to be gender neutral.

Just after Massey's one-year anniversary at Calvary, seven elected deacons were announced on the first page of *The Calvary Tower*, with two women included: Barbara Caperton and Sharon Hoffman.²⁹ "They were already deacons, it's just we just didn't call them that," Massey said. "And so, um, and they were very obvious people, and so once we kind of got over the hump of deciding this is what we're going to do it felt, I think, for the vast majority of the church it felt natural."³⁰ That same year in 1991, when the

²⁸Quoted from Ken Massey, phone interview with author, 6 November 2007.

²⁹*The Calvary Tower*, Waco, Texas: 12 November 1991, v 27, 7.

³⁰*Ibid.*

church was hit by lightening twice, Massey joked that he did not take these lightning strikes as a sign from God that he was moving the church in the wrong direction as some church members were joking about, because he knew that "God's aim is better than that. If he were after me he could have hit me."³¹

The change to including female deacons, while not agreed upon by all, did not cause near the debate it had the potential to. "Charlie [Jones, a deacon at the time] took some hits, and I did too."³² Several very conservative deacons resigned, but Massey says they were not exceedingly active anyway, and the changes continued in a positive direction in Massey's opinion. The next year in 1992, two of the three nominees for deacons were women.³³

One of the most direct impacts that Massey credits to the women deacons was deciding to keep Calvary at its location at 18th and Bosque instead of moving to the suburbs like many churches were doing:

³¹Ken Massey, phone interview with author, 6 November 2007.

³²Quoted from Ken Massey, phone interview with author, 6 November 2007.

³³*The Calvary Tower*, Waco, Texas: 27 October 1992, v27, 55.

Had it just been men, the church might have decided to relocate. It was a transition neighborhood, kind of a tough neighborhood, people drove a long way, um, you know, the facilities were going to need quite a bit of, of work, and, you know, it was going to take a lot of money, and, you know, we might just be better to locate closer to where our members are, or, you know, whatever. But the women were the driving force in saying, 'Well no, God put us here for a reason, and we should have some kind of ministry in this location.'³⁴

Helen Stem, a member of Calvary since 1952, commenting on the inclusion of women to the deacon ballot, said, "I really think it was Ken that started to begin to open, as I said earlier, to open doors, and I think it's a good thing!"³⁵ Massey's movement towards gender neutral terms and including women in all aspects of the church led the congregation in a more moderate direction. The young, dynamic preacher showed the congregation that when both women and men are leaders within a church, positive changes can occur and benefit the entire church, lightning strikes or not.

After several years at Calvary, Massey took another leap and was pivotal in hiring Fran Porter as Minister to

³⁴Ken Massey, phone interview with author, 6 November 2007.

³⁵Helen Stem, interview with author, 7 November 2007.

Senior Adults in November of 1995.³⁶ Porter was a natural choice for the position since she was already greatly admired in the church, and not a stranger to the congregation. Porter made hospital visits, conducted funerals, and become the "church mother" for Calvary. "If I had to point to a single factor in the church calling Julie, that would be it," Massey commented on Porter's involvement and influence within the church. "Fran did a great job... Sometimes when you hear about somebody like that you just kind of go, well people are just kind of exaggerating, after the fact, but she really was gracious to a fault, patient, um, and just loving... And she didn't just focus on older adults, she really became the mother of the congregation."³⁷ Porter retired from her position in December of 1999.

In 1997, Ken Massey resigned as senior pastor after seven years in Waco, and a pastor search committee was formed to find Calvary's tenth pastor. The committee's first meeting was held September 14, 1997, and officers were quickly elected. Don Corley and Tom Purdy were

³⁶Marla Pierson, "Woman to lead church: Baptist congregation torn over gender of newly called pastor," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 1 June 1998, 2A.

³⁷Ken Massey, phone interview with author, 6 November 2007.

nominated to be the committee chair, but since Corley was the only member not present at the meeting, Tom Purdy was elected. Other members included vice-chair Linda Livingstone, Marion Boden, Michelle Collins, David Lintz, D. G. Melton, Michael Russo, and Leslie Smith, and two alternates: Roland Clark and Bob Thrift. Pastor search committees at Calvary had to be comprised of at least three men, three women, three under forty years of age, and three over forty years. These rules to regulate the age and sex of the committee members had been in place at Calvary for nearly every search process.³⁸

The committee promptly organized a survey to give to church members to see what qualities they wanted in a pastor. Questions included blank spaces to write in what preferred qualities the members wanted, ranking desired professional strengths, leadership style, and ministerial emphasis, and boxes to check which Baptist groups they affiliated themselves with. The survey showed the members wanted a pastor with seminary training that was strong in pastoral skills and care and that leaned towards the beliefs of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

³⁸Committee member D. G. Melton remembers his wife, Pat, being on the 1960 committee for Hubert T. Yount, although women have always been part of pastor search committees at Calvary.

Comments mainly discussed a compassionate person with a strong faith, who had moderate Baptist beliefs. Several used gender specific language, such as "a man of God," and several others unambiguously stated that the pastor should be male, although the search committee claimed that none of the members said one way or the other which sex was desired.³⁹

With this list of guidelines set by the church, the committee set forth to search for candidates. They met at 8:00 AM every Saturday to discuss possible candidates and follow up on contenders that were still on the list. Pouring over resumes and tapes after the initial contact with the candidates, the committee reviewed the applicants. Some of applicants sought out the committee, and some the committee contacted who were already pastoring a church. It was a continuous dance between the committee and the candidates; not only did the committee have to approve the candidates, but the candidates had to approve even being in consideration.

Committee chair Tom Purdy contacted CBF director Daniel Vestal for candidates that Vestal thought were

³⁹Pastor Search Committee, "Comments from Church Survey," Presented 15 December 1997, notes from David Lintz.

particularly dynamic. Not only was Vestal a powerful member within the CBF, but he was also a Waco native, and he and three of his children graduated from Baylor.⁴⁰ Further tying Vestal to the community, Vestal was Truett Seminary's founding chairman of trustees.⁴¹ Not only was his opinion as CBF director important, but his knowledge of the community and Calvary made his input even more valuable.

At the ninth meeting of the Pastor Search Committee on January 12, 1998, Purdy reported to the committee Vestal's suggestions. One of those happened to be what would become the most controversial candidate Calvary would ever consider: Julie Pennington-Russell. For the next nineteen weeks, Pennington-Russell's name remained on the list of candidates the committee was still considering, and after a trip to California to see her preach in person, they knew the hardest part of the their job had just begun.

⁴⁰Marla Pierson, "Homecoming for Leader: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship coordinator speaking at Calvary," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 10 October 1998, 6B.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 6B.

CHAPTER THREE

Julie Pennington-Russell's Path to the Pastorate

For the members of Calvary Baptist Church, appointing a woman pastor was more disruptive than many had imagined it would be. In their search for a new pastor to replace their departing pastor, Ken Massey, they were leaning toward a pastor from a minority group to reflect the community. Calvary had remained located in downtown Waco in a conscious attempt to revive Christianity in the poorer areas of the community, with many different minority groups living nearby. The church membership, however, did not reflect the racial and economic makeup of the neighborhood, and Calvary staff hoped the church would someday be more reflective of the surrounding neighborhoods. The Pastor Search Committee had several pastors in mind to fit this need, but it was the suggestion of CBF founder and director David Vestal to consider a female pastor in California that made them begin to rethink their original ideals for their next church leader.

Calvary wanted a pastor with experience, but also who had skill in helping churches return to a state of invigoration and growth. Pennington-Russell had both.

Julie Pennington-Russell had been both associate of Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco from 1984 to 1992, and senior pastor of the same church from 1992 to 1998. But her path to the position of senior pastor in California was not as simple as it would seem. In fact, she had been opposed to female pastors until her own time in seminary.

Pennington-Russell's parents were both from Birmingham, Alabama, but after her father enlisted in the Air Force, they moved frequently around the country.¹ She was born in Ohio, but Pennington-Russell did not claim any one city as her hometown since they never stayed long enough to settle down.² She credited her time during middle school and early high school as having the greatest impact on her when her father was stationed in Atwater, California. The general acceptance of different cultures in California during the tremulous times of the 1970s made her realize that differences could be positive.

¹Julie Pennington-Russell, "One Woman's Response to the SBC", in *Putting Women in their Place: Moving Beyond Gender Stereotypes in Church and Home*, edited by Audra and Joe Trull; 22.

²Kristen N. Sullivan, "And your daughters shall prophesy- Waco hires state's first female Southern Baptist senior pastor," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 28 June 1998; 1.

Her parents took her and her brother to different Baptist churches as they were growing up, mostly conservative, traditional churches. Once Pennington-Russell's father retired from the Air Force when she was in college, the Pennington family returned to Orlando where they had bought a house in the 1960s with intentions of returning after retirement. The family settled into First Baptist Church of Orlando once they had moved back, a Southern Baptist mega-church that did not allow women to speak or pray in worship services. Pennington-Russell wondered why it was only the men that led the church, but accepted it as the normal structure of churches.

The first year of college had led her to Louisiana, but once her father retired in Orlando, Pennington-Russell transferred to the University of Central Florida in Orlando, where she majored in Communicative Disorders. During this time, her mother decided that she would also return to school, and the two carpooled from home to the university and back nearly everyday. Pennington-Russell's involvement at First Baptist Orlando made her consider seminary once she graduated. Even though First Baptist Orlando did not allow women to speak in church, they were supportive of women who attended seminaries.

When deciding which seminary to attend, Pennington-Russell thought the decision was simple: her boyfriend at the time was attending New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. When the relationship ended before the start of classes, she decided on a fresh start at a different seminary. The move to the San Joaquin valley in California during her teenage years had such an impact on her that she decided to consider California's Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, located in San Francisco, and she once again moved across the country to begin work on her Masters of Divinity.³

Even with her knowledge of the liberal atmosphere in California, Pennington-Russell was still unprepared for the overwhelming acceptance within the seminary of women that had ambitions to become pastors. She could not imagine herself as a pastor since she had only known men to fill that position. "I'm embarrassed today by the narrow beliefs I unquestioningly adopted as a teenager and young adult," Pennington-Russell wrote in a chapter of *Putting Women in Their Place*.⁴ Her time at seminary changed her views of religion from conservative to moderate, and while it would be a challenge as a woman to become a preacher,

³Pennington-Russell, 23.

⁴Ibid., 26.

and a controversial challenge at that, she began to take classes geared towards preaching.

Pennington-Russell began to look at what scripture had to say about women in ministry, and to decide for herself how to interpret the stories and statements:

One of the principles of good biblical interpretation is you never build an entire system of thought on one or two passages in the Bible. Another principle is, you have to consider the culture to which the words were addressed. You cannot read those passages such as the ones in Ephesians without, at least, considering the first-century world to which Paul was writing.⁵

Pennington-Russell said in response to the conservatives' belief that God does not sanction women to preach.⁶

Two years into her graduate career at Golden Gate, she met Tim Russell who was also a student at the seminary. The two became good friends until Tim graduated, when they began a romantic relationship. Tim was a campus minister at Santa Barbara, and the distance made them realize that they were more than just friends. Two years later, Tim and Julie married and both changed their last names to Pennington-Russell.

⁵Quoted in Cecile S. Holmes and Richard Vara, "Baptist draw line in moral sand: us vs. them," *Houston Chronicle*, 13 June 1998; 1.

⁶Ibid., 1.

Through the seminary Pennington-Russell had also been directed to a small church on the other side of the Golden Gate Bridge, called Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church. The church was in need of a music minister, and as soon as they found out that Julie Pennington-Russell could play the piano they offered her the position. Many more responsibilities like pastoral care came along with the position (which is typical in small churches), and soon she was asked to be the associate pastor. Just after her marriage, the church began searching for a new senior pastor and offered the position to Pennington-Russell, which she declined since she was still adjusting to married life, and the position was soon filled. Just a few years later, in 1993, the church began another search for a senior pastor, and once again offered the job to Pennington-Russell. This time Pennington-Russell felt she could take on the position and accepted their offer. She balanced her new family life with the church responsibilities, and twice took twelve week long maternity leaves for her two children, Taylor and Lucy.⁷

Several years after Pennington-Russell graduated from Golden Gate Seminary, the seminary became more and more

⁷Sullivan, 1.

conservative, which meant that support for women began to wane. Even though she had preached there three times as a student, Julie was invited two times to speak at her alma mater by her former professors only to be told later that the invitation had been revoked by the trustees.⁸

Fundamentalists were now the majority of the powerful trustees, and their beliefs that women should not preach directly affected Pennington-Russell. She wrote, "I have no fondness for fundamentalism in any of its rigid forms. But my own personal journey has reminded me to be more patient with fundamentalist *people* who see things differently than I do."⁹

During her time as senior pastor of Nineteenth Avenue, Pennington-Russell also served on several committees and boards, including the coordinating council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and board member of the Baptist Joint Commission.¹⁰ Even with these accolades, for the duration of Pennington-Russell's time as pastor of Nineteenth Avenue, the California Baptist Convention twice

⁸Sullivan, 1.

⁹Pennington-Russell, 26.

¹⁰Pierson, 2A.

refused to seat her church's messengers because they had a female pastor.¹¹

Even with the negative publicity the church received, Pennington-Russell's excellence in preaching did not go unnoticed. Daniel Vestal, one of the founders of the Cooperative Baptist Convention, knew Pennington-Russell and thought highly of her. Calvary's Committee chairperson Tom Purdy was friends with Vestal from previous work experience, and Vestal was familiar with Calvary since he had preached at revival services led by Calvary's youth in May of 1966.¹² After Purdy contacted Vestal about whom he recommended for Calvary's Search Committee to consider, Purdy contacted Pennington-Russell to see if she would be interested in becoming a candidate. "I'd been approached by a fair number of churches over the years, but I'd never felt an inclination to taken another step with any of them," said Pennington-Russell.¹³ The call from Purdy stood out, though, and she began to picture what life could be like in Texas.

¹¹Pennington-Russell, 21.

¹²David Lintz, "The Calvary Baptist Church Story," Waco, Texas, typed notes given to author by Lintz.

¹³Claudia Feldman, "Calm in the Storm: Julie Pennington-Russell becomes the first Southern Baptist woman to serve as senior pastor of a Texas church," *Houston Chronicle*, 2 August 1998, 1.

The search committee moved slowly at first, trying to look at all the candidates and potential candidates as fairly and practically as possible. With over 100 names to consider, they had a difficult time narrowing the list down to only the most qualified that would fit well within the church. In December of 1997, they made a list of questions for the candidates that included, "Please comment on your experience with women in ministry," showing that keeping women included in the church was important to the committee.¹⁴

The committee contacted Pennington-Russell about a resume, which was mailed to Waco and discussed by the Committee at the twelfth meeting on 2 February 1998. Soon tapes of her sermons were asked for and received. While this transfer of information was underway, the committee was visiting other candidates, listening to them preach, and interviewing them. At the fourteenth meeting on 16 February 1998, the committee planned to visit two candidates, but the notes also commented that Pennington-Russell was, "liked by all; extended discussion on aspects of female pastor; agreed to pursue further; try to set up video conference." At this point, Pennington-Russell was

¹⁴Pastor Search Committee, *Questions for the Candidate*, 15 December 1997, typed questions written by the committee, given to author by David Lintz. See Appendix A.

beginning to be seen as a strong candidate, and gender did not seem to stop the committee from pursuing her further.¹⁵

At the next meeting, there was intense discussion of the consequences of hiring Pennington-Russell as Calvary's pastor. Brad Creed, interim pastor and Baylor religion professor, asked to meet with the committee the following Wednesday to discuss "the ramifications of a woman pastor." Paul Stripling, president of the Waco Baptist Association, was contacted by one of the committee members as well, and Stripling honestly told him that "there would be some opposition." Still, the committee decided to forge ahead and visit Pennington-Russell at Nineteenth Avenue in March. By this point, the number of candidates had been greatly reduced.¹⁶

Once Calvary's Pastor Search Committee had listened to her preach and talked to her about becoming their pastor, they knew that they were going to have a difficult time

¹⁵Pastor Search Committee, *Minutes and Notes*, from the fourteenth meeting on 16 February 1998 to the thirty-sixth meeting on 31 May 1998, typed notes given to author by David Lintz.

¹⁶There were eleven other candidates listed in the *Minutes and Notes* of the fifteenth meeting of the Pastor Search Committee on 23 February 1998, although Pennington-Russell received the most discussion and the committee began to discuss implications of her appointment. Four "New candidates for consideration" were included, but all are removed from list.

convincing the church. Rumors had been swirling around the church that the committee was "considering calling a woman pastor from 'liberal' San Francisco."¹⁷ A call to a committee member expressed these concerns, and a fear in a "drop in giving and a possible split from the church if she were called."¹⁸ What the committee saw as a deal breaker in calling Pennington-Russell was her stance on homosexuality. If she saw homosexual behavior as acceptable, the committee feared a backlash from the church. Only when she had given the committee the sufficient answer that she did not support homosexual behavior but did believe they should be loved just as anyone else, did the committee decide to bring the Pennington-Russell family to Waco.

One of the senior members of the committee, D.G. Melton, also had to be convinced that Pennington-Russell was the right person for the job since his original plan was to vote against her, and there had to be 100 percent agreement among the committee members before presenting the vote to the church. As the oldest member of the committee, Melton had been raised with only men as pastors and did not believe that a woman should take on this role. This first

¹⁷Quoted from typed committee notes, 27 April 1998, given to author by David Lintz.

¹⁸Ibid.

roadblock was bypassed when Melton listened to an ordained female deacon at Calvary preach at a funeral and saw her as the one to lead the way for a female senior pastor. As D.G. Melton tearfully articulated in an interview:

I have never expressed this, to [clears throat] anyone else, but since you're here, uh, I've not even told Pat [Melton's wife]. But at Paula Vance's funeral service that morning I looked at Fran [Porter] and this thought went through my mind [clears throat]: God originally sent John the Baptist as a forerunner for the Christ. And the thought came to my mind: we have ordained one woman already, is she a forerunner of the one that's to come?¹⁹

This strong belief in faith and that God was behind Pennington-Russell, regardless of her gender, was the major factor in her appointment according to all members that have been interviewed.²⁰ They were able to see the Bible in accordance with these beliefs instead of against them.

Once the search committee had given their vote of confidence in Pennington-Russell, she and her husband came to Waco to spend time meeting the members of Calvary and letting them ask her questions, on everything from her personal life to her theological beliefs. The first meeting was on May 27 with the Youth and College Departments, with a total of six meetings over the course

¹⁹Pat and D.G. Melton, interviewed by author, Hewitt, Texas, 28 November 2006.

²⁰Nine members in all were interviewed.

of four days. These initial meetings were open to all members, and everyone was allowed to ask questions. Attendance was remarkable: forty-nine attended the Youth and College meeting, although only twenty were actually youth or college age. The largest meeting was attended by sixty-six at the Senior Adult meeting, and the smallest meeting still included thirty members.

We had meetings inside the church and she would meet with various departments inside the church, and uh, we met one time and...Julie was there to ask and answer questions. And it was a very, very good meeting...everyone had the opportunity to ask Julie whatever they wanted to ask, and uh, very open. And uh, everyone left the room, I say everyone, I'm speaking for myself, left the room much more comfortable than they were when they came in.²¹

Questions that the members asked Pennington-Russell included her beliefs on homosexuality and abortion, how she balanced her career and her family, which theologians and intellectuals she read and admired, why both she and her husband decided to hyphenate their last names, and if she was a 49ers football fan.²²

At the end of the week of meetings with Pennington-Russell, all church members met to debate the pros and cons of appointing her, and then they voted. The meeting lasted

²¹Alva Stem, interviewed by author, 7 November 2007.

²²According to notes from the meetings, taken by David Lintz.

for hours, with bitter debates on both sides, and Baylor professors brought in to chime in on how scripture should be interpreted.²³ Alva Stem was present for the church-wide meeting that began with debates and ended in the church's vote on whether or not to invite Pennington-Russell as Calvary's pastor: "Lots of times you had people telling you what the Bible says, and they both were saying basically the same thing but interpreting it a different way."²⁴ At the end of this last meeting, the church voted on whether they supported Pennington-Russell to become the next pastor of Calvary. When the votes were tallied, 266 members voted, with 72 percent voting to accept her.²⁵ While many male pastors would not accept the position with a vote of less than 90 percent approval, many women will

²³This has been debated by all the interviewees, some claim that all the professors were members of Calvary and had a right to be there, but others remember non-members being brought in to the meetings and debating scripture interpretation. They do agree that Baylor professors, members or not, were present and asked to give their opinion on how to interpret whether God approves of women pastors.

²⁴Alva Stem, interview by author, 7 November 2007.

²⁵See Appendix B.

accept at much lower rates, mostly because women do not usually get a high approval.²⁶

The church voted 190 to 73 in favor of calling Pennington-Russell as their pastor, and in 1998, at the age of thirty-seven, Julie Pennington-Russell accepted Calvary's invitation and became the first woman senior pastor of a Baptist church in Texas.²⁷ The age groups providing the most 'no' votes were from the 70s, 80s, and, surprisingly, the 30s. Calvary was not the type of Baptist church that anyone expected to make this decision, especially since Calvary had only begun ordaining women deacons seven years before, in November of 1991.²⁸

²⁶Claudia Feldman, "Calm in the storm- Julie Pennington-Russell becomes the first Southern Baptist woman to serve as senior pastor of a Texas church," *Houston Chronicle* 2 August 1998.

²⁷Marla Pierson, "Woman to lead church: Baptist congregation torn over gender of newly called pastor," *Waco Tribune-Herald* 1 June 1998, 1A.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 2A.

CHAPTER FOUR

After Calvary's Calling

Just before beginning her new job, the Pennington-Russell family took a trip back to Orlando and spent some time at Disney World, a theme park which some members of the SBC had boycotted the year before. This subtle defiance against the Southern Baptist Convention was just one more way Julie stood apart from the conservative convention. For members of Calvary Baptist Church, Disney World did not even register as a threat to their church.¹

Once the announcement was made that Julie Pennington-Russell had been appointed Calvary's newest pastor, several families left the Waco church in protest. An estimated one third of Sunday parishioners stopped coming to Calvary or moved their membership to other local Baptist churches, with a large number moving to Western Heights Baptist Church, in west Waco. The first Sunday, however, Calvary's pews were filled with over 300 curious spectators and members of other churches that wanted to support Calvary's

¹Marla Pierson, "A time for change: New female pastor gives 1st sermon," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 10 August 1998, 1A.

decision.² The Pastor Search Committee's chairman Tom Purdy described that Sunday as being filled with energy and excitement over the new pastor:

The services were packed, and as I told you we were packed outside by the protestors. Uh, the sermon, even those that later decided it was wrong, three, only three, told me in various ways that even though they were against a woman being pastor they were impressed with her ability to communicate.³

All eyes and ears were focused on Pennington-Russell, and according to Purdy, she was well received and even surprised some who expected to be disappointed.

News of absent members had not escaped Pennington-Russell's ears, and she commented comically on the change during her first sermon: "You have said goodbye to a number of brothers and sisters who were dear to you. And I am sorry. Now you have a new pastor and heaven help us, she's a woman."⁴

The same year that Pennington-Russell was appointed to Calvary, the Southern Baptist Convention added Amendment XVIII, or the Family Amendment, to the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 1963. Part of this amendment stated that:

²Marla Pierson, "A time for change: New female pastor gives 1st sermon," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 10 August 1998, 8A.

³Tom Purdy, interview with author, Waco, Texas, 17 November 2006.

⁴Pierson, 10 August 1998, 1A.

A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.⁵

Two years after this amendment was written, the SBC added to Amendment VI on The Church that, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."⁶ This created tension between Baptists who believed the Bible affirmed women as preachers, and those who believed the Bible denied women the position of pastor. It also gave members of Calvary a way to leave the church with legitimate claims, which many did. Adamant in her belief, Pennington-Russell said, "No amendment, declaration, or decree has the power to keep any child of God from wrapping his or her life around the mission of Christ as the Spirit leads. Ultimately, the choice is ours."⁷

⁵Taken from the Southern Baptist Convention's website, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Pennington-Russell, 30.

In Baptist communities, this female addition caused quite a commotion, and Pennington-Russell's appointment did not go unnoticed by the conservative groups in Texas. A group of about thirty men from Mount Enterprise, Texas, a town several hours east of Waco, came to Calvary and picketed twice: when Pennington-Russell was appointed, and on the first Sunday she preached. The "God Said" Ministries is an independent fundamentalist Baptist group from Mount Enterprise, Texas, and is led by Pastor W.N. Otwell.⁸ They came with Pastor Otwell's son, Rocky Otwell, with signs posted with catchy phrases such as, "The spirit of Jezebel: today's 'liberated woman' is under her control," and "Working women equal moral corruption: working mothers equal child abuse."⁹ Pennington-Russell was unfazed by the picketing: "For me, the picketers were not a big deal at all. I'm coming from San Francisco where people demonstrate over everything. If their coffee's not

⁸W. N. Otwell refused to an interview with the author in November of 2007. When the author asked if she could visit the church he pastors, Heritage Baptist Church, Pastor Otwell responded that the church was private and closed to the public. All information about the group was found through Heritage's ministry's, The 'God Said' Ministry, website, and through flyers distributed by the picketers, who are from Heritage Baptist.

⁹Marla Pierson, "Men picket church's new pastor," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 8 June 1998, 1 and 8 A.

hot enough, they're demonstrating. I told somebody that I thought someone had staged a picket just to make me feel at home."¹⁰

The "God Said" Ministries also passed out flyers to the group of men and women filing into the church, in order to show that they were in complete disagreement with Calvary's decision. The flyers pointed out where in the Bible it says that women should not be allowed to speak in church, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12, and adds:

The Lord reproved and rebuked the church at Thyatira for suffering that woman Jezebel, to teach and to seduce his servants (Rev. 2:20-23). Notice she called *herself* a prophetess. The Lord did *not* call her a prophetess. The Lord gave her a space (of time) to repent of her wickedness, but she did not repent. So the Lord put her to bed, along with all those who laid with her to commit adultery, and great tribulation was put upon them. The Lord said he would kill her children with death. In other words, the Lord will kill all of her converts, whom she wins to herself.¹¹

The "God Said" Ministries also blames the feminist movement for the ruin of the home and family, saying that God

¹⁰Quoted in "Knocking down doors," by Ashlee Ross, *Baylor Lariat*, 23 September 1998.

¹¹Italics are not additions by the author. See Appendix C for a copy of the flyer.

ordained women to stay at home and did not ordain them in the church.¹²

In the opening paragraph of the "God Said" Ministries' website, Otwell gives explicit reasons for atrocities in American culture:

We must hold working mothers responsible for child abuse, abortion, domestic violence, divorce, teen pregnancies, drug and alcohol abuse, pornography, teen crime, gang violence, racial tension and the economic and health care crisis – as we do the drug dealer who sells drugs to the children of America. Women must be held responsible for their crime against God, the home, the husband, the children and our society... Women in the work force can be blamed for most of America's ills and her spiritual, moral and social problems.¹³

Otwell was not the only one with these strong feelings, and Pennington-Russell became an easy target to release this hatred upon. A letter was once sent to her husband saying:

First allow me to address the subordinate marriage partner of that would-be leader of a Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, i.e. the depressingly-hyphenated Ms. Julie Pennington-Russell—whose last name says all there is to say about her subscription to yet another passage of scripture which goes something like this: *'Wives, submit to your husbands...'* I shall pray for you this day, MISTER Pennington-Russell, because you are obviously in dire need of it.¹⁴

¹²W. N. Otwell, "Mamma, Come Home! Your Children Need You," www.godsaidministries.com/mothers.htm, accessed 12 December 2007.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Quoted in Pennington-Russell, 28.

Newspapers, local and national, also commented on Calvary's decision, and many gave opinions on the "God Said" Ministries. The *Waco Tribune-Herald* included letters from the community and editorials commenting on Calvary's decision. The letters written to the *Waco Tribune-Herald* by members of the community during Pennington-Russell's appointment both condemned and supported Calvary's decision. Dava Butler began her letter to the paper by saying, "I'd like to applaud Calvary Baptist Church in its decision to appoint Julie Pennington-Russell as senior pastor. The church's decision is wonderfully progressive and admirably enlightening."¹⁵ In the same edition, Phillip R. Vierke wrote, "A woman is as qualified, if not more so, to minister to the needs of the children of God as any man who has answered the same calling."¹⁶ The next month a woman wrote a letter to the newspaper against women pastors: "Pastors and preachers are not the same thing in Holy Scripture. A pastor, shepherd, bishop, overseer, elder (descriptive terms for the same office) is to be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy and Titus.) This

¹⁵"Letters," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 12 June 1998, 12A.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

qualification does not allow women to occupy this office."¹⁷

In spiritual matters the battle became very personal, with no way to reach a middle ground.

Just after Calvary announced Pennington-Russell's appointment, the Southern Baptist Convention, led by Texan and fundamentalist Paige Patterson, perfectly timed their change in the *Baptist Faith and Message* to say women should submit to men in 1998. Pennington-Russell commented by saying, "I would say that this shows that the Southern Baptist Convention has gotten as conservative as it possibly can."¹⁸ Overall, women of the SBC agreed with the revised statement. Mary Mohler, wife of Southern Seminary president Al Mohler, said, "'Submit' is not a negative word. It may be a politically incorrect word. It may not be a popular word. But it is a biblically correct word, and that is what counts."

On 3 July 1998, three of the four letters to the *Waco Tribune-Herald* supported women in Baptist life, and disgust expressed by Otwell's and the Southern Baptist Convention's

¹⁷Sue Harris, "No Authority," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 1 August 1998, 8A.

¹⁸Quoted in Cecile S. Holmes and Richard Vara, "Baptists draw line in moral sands: us vs. them," *Houston Chronicle*, 1.

beliefs against women in ministry.¹⁹ Baptist women were the most furious, writing, "I am writing to ensure the Rev. W. N. Otwell that I am neither morally corrupted nor a child abuser... In my house I am not silent. I do teach, both by lesson and example. Most importantly, in my house, authority is shared," said T. L. Cross, and, "The recent amendment adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention concerning the role of women in our modern society is a travesty to the basic freedom of humanity," wrote Mandolin Shannon. "The only shame at Calvary Baptist on June 7 was the men who harassed people gathering to worship God," wrote Seventh and James Baptist Church pastor Raymond Bailey.²⁰ The next day in a poignant letter to the Waco newspaper, a woman wrote, "I see that the latest Baptist announcement is that wives should be submissive to their husbands. Funny how I've never heard of an abuse shelter for men. Funny how when I was in an abuse shelter it was all women. I'm as much a child of God as any man. I expect to have a say in the major decisions of my life."²¹

¹⁹"Letters," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 3 July 1998, 12A.

²⁰Quoted in "Letters," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 3 July 1998; 12A.

²¹Quoted in "Letters," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 4 July 1998; 8A.

The BGCT's magazine, *The Baptist Standard*, also had many comments on the SBC's decision to change the *Faith and Message* to say wives should submit, and on Calvary's decision. A letter by John William Unger of Huntsville wrote:

Today, Texas Baptists should be in mourning for one of our churches has left the word of God. Although the search committee chairman said, "We take the Bible very seriously as the word of God," (June 10 *Standard*) by the actions of Calvary Church, Waco, we see a congregation which displays at best a serious misunderstanding of the Bible. God, who inspired the Apostle Paul to write that "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female," also inspired the same apostle to write, "I do not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man."²²

The four other letters published in the same issue condemned the SBC's actions of the submission statement, and all were written by men. The next week, two letters rebuked the *Standard* for the sensational headline of "SBC puts wives, Patterson in place," and were written by women.²³ These women supported wives submitting to their husbands, and did not believe the *Standard's* article was unbiased or fair.

Even with bitter debates ongoing and protestors on the church doorsteps, Pennington-Russell remembered the

²²John William Unger, "Cause for mourning," *The Baptist Standard*, 17 June 1998.

²³"Letters," *The Baptist Standard*, 24 June 1998.

friendly welcome from Texans exceeding her expectations, "When I first came to Texas I was overwhelmed by the warm and effusive welcome I received from people around the state. Immediately invitations began to come to serve on committees and to lead this retreat or to speak at that meeting."²⁴ While California Baptists refused to seat Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church for hiring Pennington-Russell as senior pastor, Texans were more open to the idea and accepted Calvary's decision.

Many Baylor faculty and staff welcomed Calvary's decision to hire Pennington-Russell. The *Houston Chronicle* quoted Dr. Herbert Reynolds, former Baylor president who had made drastic changes in the school's structure to keep fundamentalism out, as saying, "She is going to be doing the work of the Lord, and I want to encourage her. I want to welcome her and get to know her personally."²⁵ He also praised the search committee for their daring decision, "They had the courage to follow the Lord instead of the dictators in opposition." In the same article, the SBC's spokesman Herbert Hollinger commented on Reynolds's views

²⁴Pennington-Russell, 29.

²⁵Claudia Feldman, "Calm in the Storm, Julie Pennington-Russell becomes the first Southern Baptist woman to serve as senior pastor of a Texas church," *Houston Chronicle* 2 August 1998, 1.

by saying, "We think he's way out, just way out in left field. He's not a person to look to for an objective interpretation of Southern Baptist thought."²⁶

In October of 1998, Daniel Vestal returned to Waco to preach at Calvary and show that the CBF supported Calvary's decision.²⁷ A month later, Calvary's new pastor and ten messengers were seated at the Baptist General Convention of Texas's annual meeting in Houston, a sharp contrast to the reception Pennington-Russell had received in California.²⁸ Amazingly, the state that has produced some of the most prominent fundamentalist leaders, such as former SBC presidents Paige Patterson and W. A. Criswell, was the same state that overall welcomed a woman into the pastorate with open arms.

On June 17, 2007, a Baptist church nearly one thousand miles away from Waco, Texas, voted to appoint Pennington-Russell as their new pastor, much to the surprise of Calvary's members. Beginning August 19, 2007, Pennington-

²⁶Feldman, 1.

²⁷Marla Pierson, "Homecoming for leader- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship coordinator speaking at Calvary," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 10 October 1998, 6B.

²⁸Jim Jones, "Texas Baptists to vote on submission resolution- Moderate-led group re-elects Dilday as president," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 10 November 1998.

Russell began her career with First Baptist Church of Decatur, Georgia, a historic church with nearly 3,000 members. First Baptist still maintained ties with the Southern Baptist Convention at the time of her appointment, making the church the largest SBC church with a female pastor.²⁹

Even though Pennington-Russell helped open the doors for female pastors, Calvary's associate pastor, Jonathan Grant, said that he did not expect Calvary to appoint another female pastor anytime soon since the church was looking for a pastor with experience in a medium-sized church, and with so few women pastors in Baptist churches, the chances are slim.³⁰

Pennington-Russell broke barriers for Baptist women in the state of Texas, and continued to force others to examine the roles of women in the Bible and in Baptist life. She did not desire to become a feminist taking a stand against a male-dominated profession, but her firm belief that God created men and women as equals in all

²⁹Audrey Barrick, "Baptist megachurch prepares for female senior pastor," *Christian Post*, 30 May 2007.

³⁰Jonathan Grant, private interview with author, Waco, Texas, 4 September 2007.

aspects has led her to blaze a trail that other women have steadily followed.

I'm rarely more frustrated than when someone tries to pay me a compliment by saying, 'You're not one of those angry feminists.' In the first place, I *am* a feminist—or as I prefer to say, an *equalist*. Feminism means different things to different people... Another reason I bristle when someone assures me that I'm not an 'angry feminist' is that this particular comment is horribly dismissive of the legitimate anger of many women, the shoes of whom the well-meaning person obviously has never walked in.³¹

Three years after Pennington-Russell, Pastor Dorisanne Cooper was appointed senior pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco. Even though the response to the next female pastor appointed in Texas did not create quite a stir as Pennington-Russell's, Cooper still felt the pressure of being female and being a pastor:

When I was in college, actually, I worked for a summer at Seventh and James [Baptist Church]... after I was at seminary, so I came home and worked after my first year, and I was reading scripture in worship, and apparently there was a visitor, and he wrote a letter of condemnation to me and to the congregation that they would have allowed me to speak from the pulpit...and I just read scripture! And I was really shaken by this, uh, I couldn't believe someone had been there that had, that would write a letter like that, um, and I, I didn't know what to do... and somehow I just thought, "You know, I'm going to start a hate mail file!"³²

³¹Pennington-Russell, 27. Italics are part of the original.

³²Dorisanne Cooper, interview with author, Waco, Texas, 29 March 2007.

Cooper's appointment was significant because not only was she the second Baptist woman appointed in Texas, but also because Lake Shore Baptist Church was the first Texas church to have a female senior and associate pastor, yet that church received little attention in the press. Lake Shore had hired Sharlande Sledge in 1985 as associate pastor. Cooper also had eighty-six per cent approval from the member vote when appointed at Lake Shore, much higher than the percentage of acceptance votes Pennington-Russell received.³³

Today, there are seven other women in Texas who are senior pastors of Baptist churches affiliated with the BGCT, CBF, or Alliance of Baptists, and many more who are co-pastors or associate pastors. "We're not exactly catapulting through the stained-glass ceiling, but I think we'll get there," Pennington-Russell remarked on women pastors being accepted by society.³⁴ There is now hope that more women will join them as Baptist pastors now that they have role models to follow: "In the nursery in San Francisco they [the children] were playing church one

³³Terri Jo Ryan, "Dorisanne Cooper will return early next year from her current job as associate pastor at College Park Baptist Church in Greensboro, N.C." *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 4 December 2001.

³⁴Quoted in Lacy Elwood, "Woman finds growth as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church," *Baylor Lariat*, 6 February 2002.

Sunday, and it was funny because the little girls were always being the pastors. We had to remind them that little boys can be pastors too," Pennington-Russell said.³⁵

Pennington-Russell is also unique as a Baptist female pastor in that each job she has accepted has become the largest Baptist church led by a woman: Nineteenth Avenue had ninety members, Calvary had an average of 300 who attended Sunday worship service at the time of her appointment, and First Baptist Decatur boasts 3,000 members.³⁶

For many female pastors, hate mail is a natural part of the job.³⁷ Pennington-Russell keeps files for mail she receives, which she calls her 'Feel Good File' and her 'Feel Bad File'. "I'm happy to say that my Feel Good File was like fourteen pounds when I left Calvary, and I think I

³⁵Quoted in Ashlee Ross, "Knocking down doors," *The Baylor Lariat*, 23 September 1998.

³⁶Robert Marus, "Pennington-Russell set to make history in Georgia," *Baptist Standard*, 1 June 2007.

³⁷Pennington-Russell and Cooper both keep files for their hate mail, and it is mentioned in "Calm in the storm," by Claudia Feldman, *Houston Chronicle* 2 August 1998, that a female pastor in Arkansas still receives hate mail even though she has been a pastor for several years.

had maybe five [inaudible] in the Feel Bad File," she commented.³⁸

Calvary's membership suffered a serious setback once Pennington-Russell began preaching: Several families left the church because they did not approve of a female pastor. Pennington-Russell even commented, "I think there were a lot of signs along the way that God was really in this because Calvary is not the church that many people would have expected to be the first to call a woman pastor, and I think it surprised Calvary. I think it surprised even the pastor search committee along the way, but when God is in it it's hard to deny."³⁹

But soon more and more moderate Baptists began to walk through the doors. By the time Pennington-Russell left Calvary for Georgia, the membership at Calvary had reached 1,065.⁴⁰ During Pennington-Russell's tenure, she had made several changes to worship style and the building structure. Right away she removed the American flag from

³⁸Julie Pennington-Russell, phone interview with author, 22 December 2007.

³⁹Ashlee Ross, "Knocking down doors" *Baylor Lariat*, 23 September 1998.

⁴⁰According to the records of the Waco Regional Baptist Network.

the sanctuary.⁴¹ Her biggest change was starting Life Groups, small groups that met outside of the church to discuss the church, Bible study, and fellowship together. In January of 2003, Calvary, under Pennington-Russell's leadership, hired Kelly Shushok, who had experience with small church groups from her previous church in Washington, D.C. Shushok and her family moved to Waco when her husband was hired by Baylor, a homecoming for the Shushoks who were Baylor graduates, and they soon found themselves returning to Calvary, the church they had attended while in college. After long talks about how to start small groups and make them central to Calvary, Pennington-Russell led in the hiring of Shushok to the church staff.⁴²

The first group formed was comprised of the church staff and their spouses and other active leaders within the church, with Shushok guiding and showing the group how to lead a small group. The group agreed to an eight month trial period, and at the end of those eight months the group split into three groups, with Shushok leading all three. By February of 2004, a year after the first group

⁴¹Alva and Helen Stem, interview with author, 7 November 2007.

⁴²Kessa Payne, private interview, Waco, Texas, 26 February 2008.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Within the city of Waco, Texas, the first and second female Baptist pastors in Texas were hired by Baptist churches. Some churches in the state had been slowly changing their stance on women in ministry by ordaining female deacons and hiring women as ministers, but none had taken the final step in hiring a female senior pastor until Calvary Baptist Church in 1998.¹ Generally thought of as a conservative city, Waco has an unusual mixture of conservative and moderate Baptists.² Once Waco is examined in light of the Baptist influences within the city, the reasons become more clear as to why it would appoint the first female Baptist pastor over large cities like Houston or Dallas.

Waco was not unused to Baptist women being in church leadership positions: Lake Shore Baptist Church had appointed a woman as associate pastor in 1985. Many

¹See Appendix D for a list of female Baptist pastors and co-pastors in Texas as of 7 March 2007.

²Marla Pierson, "Baptist legacy to, from Waco, hard to pin down: Waco area is hotbed of conservatism- or liberalism, depending on who you ask," *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 1 March 1998, 1A.

members of Lake Shore believed they would be the first to appoint a woman as senior pastor as well, and some were shocked when Calvary Baptist Church announced their groundbreaking decision. Seventh and James Baptist Church, located adjacent to Baylor's campus, was the first in Waco to ordain women as deacons in 1980. The church's centennial history magazine credits the presence of Baylor faculty and students for this decision.³

Waco is also home of the largest Baptist university in the world, Baylor University, which often gives Waco the reputation of being a very conservative, religious city. Looking at Baylor's history, however, reveals that the university is a moderate Baptist school that refused to be embraced by the fundamentalist influence within the Southern Baptist Convention.

As of 2008, Baylor University had around 14,000 students in attendance, and 804 full-time faculty members, with the vast majority of both groups consider themselves Christians. Of those faculty members, 45.8% are Baptist,

³Carol Crawford Holcomb, "Ordaining Women as Deacons," *A Century of Service: A Centennial History of Seventh and James Baptist Church, 1898-1998*; 38.

which is a large plurality over any other denomination.⁴ In the 1980s when there was a struggle for leadership of Baptist universities between moderates and fundamentalists, Baylor made decisive steps to keep fundamentalism out. President Herbert Reynolds's fear of fundamentalists infiltrating the BGCT caused him to loosen the influence that the BGCT had on electing the trustees of the university. Moderate professors that had been fired from their jobs at other Baptist universities and seminaries flocked to Baylor.⁵

Baylor University is an obvious draw for moderate Baptists to come to Waco since the university believes that remaining religiously affiliated does not have mean academic integrity must be sacrificed. This high academic standard mixed with Baptist tradition draws moderates as well as conservatives to the area, creating a diversity of beliefs for Waco Baptists. While many moderates are present, there is also a strong conservative presence. The two are able to coexist peacefully by placing the autonomy of the church over their differences.

⁴Baylor University,
<http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/36188.pdf> [accessed 4 April 2007].

⁵Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 193.

Baylor also opened Truett Seminary in the early 1990s in response to other Baptist seminaries coming under fundamentalist control. Truett is affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the CBF. Truett Seminary supports women who decide to become pastors, and Pennington-Russell is currently working there on her Doctorate in Ministry.⁶

The effects of Baylor's faculty on the Baptist churches in the area are seen most in the moderate churches. Of Lake Shore's 275 total members, Dorisanne Cooper reported nearly 25% were Baylor faculty members, and Cooper says that nearly all the faculty members were active in the church. Of the 170 to 180 active congregants that attended on any given Sunday, this makes up over one third. The associate pastor at Calvary Baptist Church, Jonathan Grant, estimated that ten to twelve percent of the 450 that attended regularly on Sundays were Baylor or Truett Seminary faculty members, with nearly half of the Truett faculty attending Calvary.⁷ He furthered that there were

⁶Robert Marus, "Pennington-Russell set to make history as pastor of large Decatur church," *Associated Baptist Press*, 29 May 2007.

⁷Including Truett's deans, faculty, and affiliated faculty, there are twenty-five faculty members listed on Truett's website. Grant stated that at least ten are currently members of Calvary.

around thirty Truett students that attended regularly, showing that Calvary has great appeal to those associated with the seminary. First Baptist Church of Woodway, a Southern Baptist church outside of Waco, reported twenty church members that were Baylor faculty, out of 1,600 that attended Sunday services and a total of 4,000 members.⁸ While these figures are only estimates of a very small number of Baptist churches within Waco, there are no other figures that have been made of Baylor faculty involvement in the community.

Seventh and James Baptist Church was the first Baptist church in Waco to ordain female deacons, and being located on Baylor's campus has had a sizeable portion of their congregation from Baylor. In a booklet created for the one hundredth anniversary of the church, they acknowledged that the faculty and students "made for a congregation open to discuss controversial issues and, if necessary, willing to step outside of tradition."⁹ The anniversary booklet gives credit to the university's faculty's and students' open-

⁸Karen Livingston, administrative assistant at First Baptist Church in Woodway, email to the author, 4 April 2007.

⁹Katie Cook, Robert Darden, Carl Hoover, eds., *A Century of Service: A Centennial History of Seventh and James Baptist Church 1898-1998*, 38-39. The first female deacons were ordained on 22 June 1980.

mindedness as a direct influence on the direction of the church, which they did not give to the general congregation that was not part of the university.

The "God Said" Ministries flyer also blames Baylor for female pastors in Waco, although for more extreme reasons: "It comes as no surprise that this departure from scriptural authority has happened in Waco, since Waco's Baylor University, a Baptist school, has, for years, been one of the main leaders in promoting liberalism of the scriptures and worldliness."¹⁰ While they may be overstating Baylor's "liberalism," they obviously see Baylor as having an influence on the community.

While Texas is ranked tenth in percentage of Baptists affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention within the state's population, it has more Baptists in terms of numbers than any other state.¹¹ The large size of the state convention, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), makes who is in control, moderates, conservatives, or fundamentalists, very important. Through the shift to

¹⁰W. N. Otwell, "News Release," 5 June 1998, flyer given to author by Tom Purdy.

¹¹www.adherents.com/largecom/com_sbc.html [accessed 6 April 2007]. 19.19% of the population of Texas is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, with a total number of 3,259,395. Georgia has the next largest number with 1,582,520.

fundamentalist power in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the BGCT has stayed true to the autonomy of the individual churches. Some Baptists in Texas believed the BGCT was too moderate, and in 1998 the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) was formed as a convention for Southern Baptists that no longer felt welcome within the BGCT.¹² Conservative conventions such as the SBC and SBTC are against women in positions of power within the conventions and individual churches, but moderate groups such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) adhere to the belief that women have as much authority to minister as men. In 2007, leaders from the CBF and the BGCT met in Waco to discuss a partnership. A covenant was written, and plans to start a church in Galveston together were created.¹³

With its beginnings as a group that supported women in ministry and disapproved of the SBC's fundamentalist shift, the CBF became a powerful religious group in its own right. Influential moderates quickly began to openly support the

¹²The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, "About Us," http://www.sbtexas.com/about_sbtc/about_us.htm [accessed 21 February 2008].

¹³Whitney Farr, "Church starters learn the ropes: BGCT & CBF establish covenant," *The Baptist Standard*, 17 August 2007.

new conference, including former president Jimmy Carter, who publicly rejected the direction of the SBC in 2000 and spoke at the CBF's annual assembly to celebrate its ten year anniversary in 2001.¹⁴ As recent as September of 2007, the CBF met with the American Baptist Churches in an effort to unite moderate Baptists and show America that not all Baptists agreed with the direction of the SBC. Today there are nearly 2,000 churches that partner with the CBF, and the annual budget has grown to \$16 million.¹⁵

Another reason that Waco may have more female pastors is because the churches in the community have kept the autonomy of the local church centrally important. When Pennington-Russell was appointed, the Baptist pastors in the area supported Calvary's decision publicly. While they may have disagreed with female pastors and believed scripture did not recognize women as church leaders, they did not specifically mention Calvary as going against scripture.

¹⁴Gayle White, "Cooperative Baptist Fellowship: Assembly to celebrate 'A Decade of Promise,'" *The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution*, 23 June 2001.

¹⁵Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, "About Us," <http://www.thefellowship.info/About-Us> [accessed 22 February 2008].

The differing of opinions over whether women should be allowed to be ministers has divided people, churches, and conventions, but it has also united people that agree on the issue. While Calvary lost nearly a third of its members over the issue, they were able to attract more moderate Baptists and revive the church over the course of the next several years. The unique climate of Texas Baptists allowed for them to place the autonomy of the church over disagreement.

Even with these moderate trends occurring in Waco, Calvary Baptist was still an unlikely church to appoint the first female pastor in the state. Ordaining female deacons had only been in place seven years before Pennington-Russell's appointment, while other churches in Waco had been ordaining women for decades.¹⁶

Baylor's influence on the Baptist community in the Waco area and the strong desire for Texas Baptists to place high importance on the autonomy of the church have made Waco religiously progressive and open to change. Overall, the city is open to discussion of biblical interpretation and acceptance of those that disagree have made it the

¹⁶Lake Shore Baptist Church ordained their female associate pastor Sharlande Sledge in 1987, and Seventh and James Baptist Church began ordaining female deacons in 1980.

focus of attacks by fundamentalist Baptists. It should be no surprise in light of the accepting nature of Waco Baptists that the city would be the first in the entire state to hire a female pastor, and overall accept her into the community with open arms.

It also should be no surprise that Calvary Baptist Church would grow and thrive under Julie Pennington-Russell's leadership. The church is considered a stable, well established congregation of moderate size by the Waco Regional Baptist Network. The church community grew closer through the inclusion of Life Groups, and Calvary attracted a large portion of the moderate Truett Seminary faculty and students.¹⁷

The issue of women in ministry is no longer a question to be discussed at Calvary; women are an equal part of the church, and men and women work together for the good of the Calvary. The history of the church shows the influences that set the congregation on this course, such as Ken Massey ordaining women deacons, and Fran Porter becoming Minister to Senior Adults. With Julie Pennington-Russell becoming the first woman to pastor a Baptist church in

¹⁷Associate pastor Jonathan Grant estimated that about thirty Truett students attend regularly, and about ten to fifteen professors were members of Calvary.

Texas, the hope is that more women will not ignore the call to preach and follow her lead.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Pastor Search Committee Survey

APPENDIX B

"God Said" Ministries Flyer Handed Out at Pennington-
Russell's First Sunday at Calvary

APPENDIX C

Calvary's Voting Records for Pennington-Russell

APPENDIX D

Female pastors in Texas as of 7 March 2007. Their churches were affiliated with at least one of the following groups: BGCT, CBF or the Alliance.¹

Pastors

1. Dorisanne Cooper	Lake Shore BC	Waco, TX
2. Laura Fregin	CityChurch	Dallas, TX
3. Ruth Ollison	Beulah Land BC	Houston, TX
4. Julie Pennington-Russell	Calvary BC	Waco, TX
5. Martha Phillips	Mount Vernon BC	Arlington, TX
6. Danielle Shroyer	Journey Church	Dallas, TX
7. Linda Thomas	Victory in Praise Ministries	Waco, TX
8. Mary Wilson	Church of the Savior	Cedar Park, TX

Co-Pastors

1. Cyndi Abee	Crossroad Fellowship Mission	Waco, TX
2. Iris Bell	Christ Church	Waco, TX
3. Cynthia Clawson Courtney	The Sanctuary	Austin, TX
4. Linda Wilkerson	Bill Harrod Memorial BC	Dallas, TX

¹Julie O'Teter, BGCT, email to author, 7 March 2007.

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