

Book Review: Called to Serve: Stories of Atlantic Baptist Women in Ministry

Edited by Hannah Hunt, Joetta Fernando, and Melody Maxwell (Wipf and Stock, 2026)

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Even though the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada (CBAC) first ordained women to the ministry in 1954, the stories of women in ministry in the CBAC have not always received the attention they are due. The editors of *Called to Serve* have stepped in to begin to rectify that problem. This book is the product of an ongoing oral history project (also titled “Called to Serve”) directed by Melody Maxwell and assisted by Hannah Hunt and Joetta Fernando—the three editors of this volume. The purpose of the oral history project is to record the stories of women who have been ordained to ministry by the CBAC. To date, the oral history project has documented the stories of over one-hundred women, fourteen of which have been published in this book.

The fourteen stories appear chronologically based on the date of ordination, ranging from 1976 to 2021. They tell of varied ministry experiences; some as pastors, others as missionaries or chaplains. After a brief introductory paragraph at the beginning of each chapter, the subjects discuss their experiences and beliefs in their own words. Several themes recur throughout the book. In particular, many subjects note an unmistakable sense of calling to ministry in spite of moments of opposition from contemporaries. In addition to these shared themes, many of the narratives contain unique perspectives that together illustrate the range of experiences for women in ministry. These include raising children as a single parent while balancing pastoral responsibilities, and coming to terms with ministry as a second career. Each chapter concludes with a series of questions for further reflection.

The book also provides an opportunity to peer into the Atlantic Baptist world over the past half century. The careful observer will note subtle theological differences between the various provinces (some of which have been the subject of discussion for historians for many years) and the role of particular staples of Atlantic Baptist life, such as Acadia Divinity College, which features into nearly every chapter.

Called to Serve is valuable for several different reasons. First, it is a helpful resource for the church. These are more than simple stories; they are spiritual testimonies and are worth telling and retelling as a witness for the benefit of Christians moving forward. Second, it is a much-needed historical resource. The records contained herein will serve as helpful primary sources for historians seeking to better understand not only the lived experiences of ordained women in Atlantic Baptist churches, but also overall denominational life during these years. As someone who grew up in Atlantic Baptist

churches, I am pleased and encouraged to see this volume in print.

At the same time, as a man who works in a ministry-adjacent environment, I am again reminded of the barriers often imposed on women that are not even a question for their male counterparts. Regrettably, many of the women in this book faced systemic difficulties during their ministries. These ranged from problematic questions during the ordination examining council,¹ to the unwanted attention of male parishioners, to simply being dismissed due to their sex. These conversations are much bigger than can be dealt with in a single book review, though they are certainly worth having. Hopefully this volume—and the other resources that have emerged from the “Called to Serve” project—will encourage others to break what various commentators have termed the “stained-glass ceiling.”

Criticisms of this book are minor. Most notably, the book would have benefitted from a more detailed orientation to the history of ordination of women among Baptists in Atlantic Canada. There is a brief retelling in the introduction that whets the appetite, but a fuller account would better ground the reader and set the stage for what follows. (I admit this is more of a “like to

have” than a “need to have” for this volume.) On a different matter, a more detailed comment from the editors on why they selected these particular women to tell the story of ordained women among Atlantic Baptists would have been appropriate. However, as noted, these are minor grievances to what is otherwise a useful and important volume.

The editors of this volume (and the “Called to Serve” project as a whole) should be commended for helping us hear from those who have—traditionally—been overlooked in the church. It is a valuable resource that is equally informative and enriching.

Notes

1. The CBAC operates with a centralized examining council in which a candidate for ministry must pass an oral examination before being recommended to the local congregation for ordination.



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