



# Associated Baptist Press

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## Churches slow to embrace new Texas Baptist budget

By Mark Wingfield and Bob Allen

DALLAS (ABP) -- This year's Baptist General Convention of Texas budget was supposed to redirect vast dollars away from Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and to Texas schools and ministries.

So far, however, churches in the state have been slow to embrace the new funding plan viewed by many on both sides as a Rubicon in Southern Baptists' long power struggle between moderates and conservatives.

The budget, adopted overwhelmingly by Texas Baptists in their annual convention last fall, replaced the traditional 67 percent BGCT/33 percent SBC division of funds received from churches through the Cooperative Program unified budget. It called for reducing funding to the SBC's six seminaries by \$4.3 million and to the SBC Executive Committee and Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission by another \$1.1 million.

The BGCT, however, permits the state's nearly 6,000 Baptist churches to choose whether their gifts are disbursed through the approved 2001 budget or optional giving plans. Through the first quarter of the giving year, more than half of contributing churches (51 percent) designated their gifts for distribution under the old 67 percent/33 percent division of funds.

Just 16 percent of contributing churches, meanwhile, had given through the adopted budget, which keeps more money in the state (72 percent) and trims the amount for worldwide causes to 28 percent. Other churches have opted for an "other" category on a remittance form that excludes certain items or alters percentages in other ways.

As a result, despite total Cooperative Program giving nearly 3 percent above adopted goals, dollars earmarked for BGCT operations lagged almost 5 percent under budget. Convention offices have been operating at 90 percent of budgeted expenditures since January, said BGCT Treasurer Roger Hall.

Also feeling the pinch are Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons, George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor and Hispanic Baptist Theological School in San Antonio. Those institutions expected a windfall from the new budget.

The Hispanic school has so far received \$34,192 in new funds, far below the additional \$150,000 anticipated by now. Logsdon and Truett have split \$102,575 in new revenues so far this year, while SBC seminaries have received \$979,659 from the BGCT. Logsdon Dean Vernon Davis said new projects planned at the school are on hold because of insufficient funds.

Those numbers may improve soon. After funding of SBC seminaries through the approved budget reaches a cap figure of \$1 million, only church-directed funds will go to SBC schools.

Texas Baptist leaders said they are not totally surprised by the figures. Hall told the Baptist Standard that leaders expected sluggish giving during the first quarter because of a poor economy.

Other officials said it is too early to project giving patterns for the entire year. Baptist churches are infamous for resisting change, they said, and some pastors may be putting off discussions about budget options to avoid controversy within their congregation.

The percentage of money coming through the adopted Texas budget has increased steadily each month, from less than 10 percent in January to more than 22 percent in March. Some Texas churches will not adopt new budgets -- and in the process consider the funding change -- until fall.

It is also unclear how much backlash to expect from the controversial budget, which has been roundly criticized by leaders in the SBC.

While 93 churches so far have contacted the BGCT asking to be removed from its membership roll, additions of new churches and missions have offset those losses to yield a net gain of 20 affiliated churches, bringing the total to 5,995.

An alternative state convention, meanwhile, reports continued growth. Southern Baptists of Texas Convention now claims about 500 uniquely aligned churches and 200 more that are dually aligned.

Houston pastor Bob Campbell, who chaired the study committee that recommended rechanneling the state's funding for theological education, said he is "disappointed that the Texas seminaries will not be supported at the level that we hoped." He said he believes, however, that more churches will embrace the new budget as they become aware of changes that have occurred at the SBC level.

Campbell agreed with other critics, however, that the remittance form approved by the BGCT Administrative Committee for use by churches is confusing.

The form presents the adopted budget and the former percentage split side-by-side, making them appear like an either-or choice.

"The problem is that Texas Baptists adopted a budget in Corpus Christi, and the way it's been interpreted is that Texas Baptists adopted a new option," said Hardin-Simmons' Davis.

Campbell said he would have preferred that the approved budget be given more prominence on the remittance form. "Apparently the Administrative Committee and other leadership personnel felt you had to put two options on there, but I thought we adopted only one plan," said Campbell, pastor of Westbury Baptist Church in Houston. He said the way the form turned out "really was not in the spirit of the convention."

The Administrative Committee's current chairman, Stephen Hatfield, defended the remittance form, while acknowledging that it was a compromise for committee members who had different interpretations of the intent of the vote in Corpus Christi. "We were as clear as we could be," said Hatfield, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lewisville. "It gives the first choice as the adopted budget."

Campbell said it is likely that the format will become an issue for discussion at this year's state convention.

Total giving to the BGCT during January, February and March exceeded \$17.4 million. That was 2 percent more than anticipated, but nearly 10 percent below the dollar amount for the same period last year.

The \$937,283 received for Texas causes was 4.7 percent below budget goals and 7.6 percent below last year.

By the end of the first quarter, 22 percent of Cooperative Program funds had come through the BGCT's adopted budget, while 46 percent were given for distribution through the old 67 percent/33 percent split. Nearly a third of the quarterly gifts came from churches that designed their own customized giving plan. Leaders said no clear trends were identified among those gifts.

## **Scholars call for recovery of meaning of 'tolerance'**

By Mark Wingfield

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Tolerance has been given a bad name, according to a panel of scholars urging Christians to recover the word's original meaning, which they argue was distorted in 18th century philosophy.

"Christianity and Toleration" was the topic of an April 9 symposium at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. The event, sponsored by Baylor's Center for Christian Ethics, focused on the recent publication of "The Long Truce: How Toleration Made the World Safe for Power and Profit," written by Chip Conyers, a professor at Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary.

Conyers says that toleration took on a different meaning after the Enlightenment, a philosophical movement that emphasized rationalism over traditional social, political and religious ideas.

Under the influence of Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke, religion was assigned to the domain of "private" affairs and as a result lost much of its moral authority, Conyers said. "Public life belonged to the state." Somewhere along the line, as a way of keeping peace among competing ideas, society developed the notion that all views should be regarded as having equal value in the name of toleration.

But Conyers and two other primary speakers said toleration has a place for people with a Christian worldview.

Conyers said his purpose is "not to discredit tolerance but to bring credit to it once again."

For the Christian, Conyers said, toleration should mean believing firmly in the eternal truth of God but still being willing to listen to other points of view. Christians can engage in conversations with those of other viewpoints, seeking to discover points of truth that can be agreed upon, he said.

In contrast, the type of toleration advocated today is "logically impossible," said J. Budziszewski, a professor of political philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin.

"The modern version of toleration operates like a Trojan horse," he said. "It shuts out every view but one -- while claiming to be neutral." Under the guise of toleration, one view gets smuggled in, Budziszewski said. "Which view is smuggled in? Well, it depends on who's doing the smuggling." In too many cases, modern appeals for toleration are merely disguised attempts to keep competing ideas off the playing field, he said.

Christians must find a way to challenge the assumption that the modern view of all-views-are-equal toleration is necessary to prevent violence, added William Cavanaugh, assistant professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn.

"Modern toleration assumes we can't disagree without doing violence to each other," he said.

In any solution that is crafted, "non-violence will have to have a central place," Cavanaugh said. "We must demonstrate that we can in fact differ without killing one another."

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## **News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **First woman to lead editors' group**

PHOENIX -- Elizabeth Young, editor of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention missions magazine "Portraits," is the first woman to be elected president of the Association of Baptist State Papers.

Young accepted the leadership gavel at the denominational journalists' recent annual meeting. She had edited the magazine since its start in 1997 and before that worked for its predecessor, the Baptist Beacon newspaper, for 17 years. (ABP)

### **State CBF balks at membership proposal**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina wants more information about a national CBF proposal to change its membership requirements.

A bylaw change to be considered at the CBF's national gathering this summer would define "partnering" churches and individuals as those that, in addition to contributing funds, affirm the organization's mission and core values.

That raised questions of church polity at a meeting of the CBF's North Carolina chapter in March. "CBF apparently seeks to define partnership and establish requirements for voting membership that may be more restrictive than other Baptist organizations," said Ed Beddingfield, pastor of First Baptist Church in Sylva, N.C., who made the motion asking the state's Coordinating Council to study the proposal.

"If any Baptist organization, including CBF, tries to require me or my church to vote on any statement of values or anything else in order to be a voting member, I'm not going to do it," Beddingfield said. (ABP)

### **Bivocational pastors convene**

PADUCAH, Ky. -- A first-ever convention for bivocational pastors from a five-state region drew 322 pastors, spouses and directors of missions to Paducah, Ky., in March.

J.D. Stake, coordinator of ministerial services and counseling for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, predicted that dual-career pastors will play an increasingly larger role in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Their time has come," said Stake. With decreasing revenues coming to state and national Baptist conventions, Stake said more new churches would have to be started by bivocational ministers.

"When students finish seminary, many churches won't have the resources to fully fund their salaries," he said. (ABP)

### **Californian elected leader of nursing fellowship**

SAN DIEGO -- Julie Conte of San Diego was elected national president of Baptist Nursing Fellowship at the group's recent meeting in Memphis, Tenn.

Conte, who is also current president of California Nurses on Mission, owns a home health-care services business.

Baptist Nursing Fellowship, in its 19th year, is a Christian organization of professional nurses that promotes continuing education and growth for members and missionary nurses. (ABP)

### **Baptist college president retiring**

CLEVELAND, Ga. -- Clark Bryan, sixth president of Baptist-affiliated Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Ga., has announced plans to retire July 31. He came to the post in 1993.

Trustees named the college's executive president, 20-year employee Danny Parker, as interim president. (ABP)

### **State convention to consider faith statement**

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. -- A committee is recommending inclusion of the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" in the constitution of the Illinois Baptist State Association.

The proposal replaces a reference to a 1963 edition of the faith statement in the current constitution. It also retains language describing the "Baptist Faith and Message" as "a statement of the majority" but not of every church or individual. (ABP)

### **Student drowns at Baptist conference**

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas -- A high-school senior from Arlington, Texas, drowned Good Friday while attending a congress for Texas Baptist Hispanic youth and singles in Corpus Christi.

Terrance Williams, 18, drowned on the afternoon of April 13 while swimming in Corpus Christi Bay between sessions of the annual conference after apparently being caught in undertow. Three other teens tried unsuccessfully to rescue him. (ABP)

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-- By ABP staff

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