



Associated Baptist Press

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Alternative Texas convention takes swipes at BGCT, notes growth

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Meeting the same dates as the Baptist General Convention of Texas and about 30 miles away, speakers at the 4-year-old Southern Baptists of Texas Convention highlighted differences between the two groups Oct. 29-30 in Fort Worth.

While denying charges that the SBTC is trying to recruit among BGCT churches, Executive Director Jim Richards said the breakaway group has "validity" among the state's Baptists because it cooperates fully with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Richards said in his executive director's report that "another convention" had cut its funding to the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries but that SBTC churches had more than made up the difference.

The SBTC formed in 1998 over differences with the BGCT's moderate leadership. The 115-year-old BGCT has had its own share of differences with the conservative direction of the SBC, including a narrowing of doctrines in a recent revision of the "Baptist Faith and Message" confessional statement.

At the SBTC meeting, Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, presented a resolution on biblical inerrancy -- "the same motion rejected by the BGCT executive board" in September, he said.

Messengers voted unanimously in support of McKissic's statement saying, "We believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and the inerrancy of the original manuscripts." The BGCT executive board tabled McKissic's motion last month for study, citing the reference to inerrancy, which many consider a divisive term.

Last year the BGCT reduced funding for SBC seminaries, redirecting monies to theological education in schools controlled by Texas Baptists.

Bill Merrell of the SBC Executive Committee mentioned that BGCT restrictions on gifts to SBC seminaries had prompted a new classification of "other designated gifts" but that other conventions had "stepped up to the plate" to support Southern Baptists.

Richard Land noted that the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, which he heads, had been totally defunded by the BGCT, "and we're proud of every reason they chose to defund us," he said.

Aside from chiding its BGCT rivals, the new convention carried on its business on a positive note, marking four years of growth and progress.

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A financial report noted that in four years the budget has grown from \$903,500 to \$8.9 million. Cooperative Program giving was up 143 percent in 2000 and thus far is up 184 percent in 2001. The SBTC sends 51 percent of its Cooperative Program receipts to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Messengers were told the SBTC had started 83 new churches in the state through October. President Rudy Hernandez noted in his report that 104 Hispanic congregations are affiliated with SBTC.

George Harris, pastor of Castle Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio, was elected president of the convention, succeeding Hernandez, who resigned to join the convention staff as a consultant in outreach to Hispanics.

Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and his wife, Dorothy, were given the convention's distinguished service award, the Paul Pressler Award, named for the Houston layman who is credited, along with Patterson, with masterminding the fundamentalist takeover in the SBC. In accepting the award, Patterson said, "Any award with Paul Pressler's name on it is an inspiration to my heart."

The convention adopted resolutions on moral decline and Christian holiness, the family, stem-cell research, affirmation of President George W. Bush and his leadership in the war on terrorism, evangelism and church planting, gratitude to God for SBTC growth and affirmation for Hernandez.

They also passed a resolution of support for Baptist Press, which some have accused of disseminating false and malicious information about the BGCT and its institutions. The resolution said Baptist Press reporters and editors "always perform at the highest of Christian and professional standards."

Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church of Plano, called SBTC messengers to a deeper commitment to prayer in his convention sermon.

As did many speakers, Graham alluded to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Graham said Satan is the ultimate terrorist and combating him will take the same kind of "believing prayer" that freed the Apostle Peter from jail in Acts 12. Believing prayer, Graham said, has God as its focus and is fervently offered by the church.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said Americans may have been shaken by the events of Sept. 11 but have not yet truly turned to God.

Graham and Mohler both said that Allah, to whom Muslims pray, is not the God of Christians.

"Allah is not Jehovah," Mohler said. "Jews and Christians do not worship the same God," he added, echoing a statement he made in a Southern Seminary chapel address the week before.

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BGCT approves \$47.5 million budget, rejects 2000 'Baptist Faith and Message'

By Ken Camp and Dan Martin

DALLAS (ABP) -- Messengers to the 116th annual Baptist General Convention of Texas in Dallas, Oct. 29-30, approved a \$47.5 million total budget goal for 2002, and elected as officers three pastors from Houston, the Dallas Fort Worth area and the Texas Panhandle.

Texas Baptists also decisively rejected an attempt to put the convention on record affirming the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" -- a motion that proponents hailed as a way to achieve "unity" but opponents characterized as "divisive."

The \$47.5 million 2002 budget is an 8.8 percent decrease from 2001. Administrative committee chairman Stephen Hatfield cited three reasons for the decrease -- organizational restructuring, the economy and the loss of churches in the past year.

Currently, 4,377 churches and 1,353 mission congregations are affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. In the past year, the BGCT lost 551 congregations and added 271 new ones, said Clay Price, research and information services manager for the convention.

Messengers elected Bob Campbell, pastor of Houston's Westbury Baptist Church, by acclamation as president. Messengers also elected Paul McBride, pastor of the predominantly African-American Friendship Baptist Church of The Colony, as first vice president and Steve Vernon, pastor of First Baptist Church in Levelland, as second vice president.

Campbell, who has served Westbury Baptist Church since 1991, is a former chairman of the BGCT executive board, and he was chairman of last year's seminary study committee. The committee recommended the redirecting of some worldwide funds from Southern Baptist Convention seminaries to meet the needs of theological education in Texas.

In his post-election news conference, Campbell said he wants to emphasize partnership missions and theological education among Texas Baptists during his presidency.

Texas Baptists partner well with others because of the BGCT's independence, Campbell said. "The BGCT is going to continue to be old-line, traditional Baptists. We have always been that, we will continue to be that."

In miscellaneous business, messengers soundly rejected a motion by Lynn Teague from First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon to place the BGCT on record as supporting the version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000.

Teague said he was making the motion in an effort at unity, and he referred to the meeting of the breakaway Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, meeting in Fort Worth simultaneously with the BGCT.

He referred to the SBTC as "friends" and as representatives of "1,000 churches which have left the BGCT or dually aligned in the last two years." He said he made the motion "not in a spirit of division" but was "speaking out for unity in the BGCT."

He said his church is considering dually aligning with the SBTC but said his effort to put the BGCT on record affirming the 2000 BFM "may help us to stay where we are."

The SBC adopted the revised statement of faith during its 2000 annual meeting. The BGCT has reaffirmed an earlier statement of faith, adopted by the SBC in 1963.

Anthony Sisemore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Floydada, opposed the 2000 statement, saying its article on Scripture is "complete heresy." In the revised statement, Sisemore said: "The Bible becomes the revelation of God, not the record (of the revelation). Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, not the Bible."

Jim Fuller, pastor of Calder Baptist Church in Beaumont, said the 1963 statement of faith "has served us well for 40 years." He also claimed that Teague's motion was not made in a spirit of unity but in a spirit of division.

In other business, BGCT messengers approved a resolution calling on Christians to pray for both the victims and perpetrators of terrorism. The resolution also encouraged prayer for national and world leaders, law enforcement and military personnel who are seeking to end terrorism.

BGCT messengers also approved a resolution on religious liberty saying that Texas Baptists "deplore the persecution of Muslims and attacks on their places of worship."

Other resolutions called for racial and cross-cultural reconciliation and voiced support for Texas Baptist institutions and ministries.

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