

BGCT to create funding channel for some former IMB missionaries _82503

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DALLAS—Texas Baptists may soon have a way for churches and individuals to provide financial support to former Southern Baptist missionaries who were terminated or resigned over the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message doctrinal statement.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas already offers a “missionary transition fund” to help former missionaries as they seek new positions. A new funding mechanism would help missionaries stay on the field after losing support from the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board.

“We are making it possible for churches and individuals to support missionaries whose ministry was taken away from them by the International Mission Board,” said E.B. Brooks, coordinator of the BGCT church missions and evangelism section. “We are doing this at the request of our churches who want to support their continued ministry.”

At least 77 of the IMB's 5,500 missionaries have left the mission field because of the new, more conservative doctrinal statement, including 13 who were fired for refusing to sign the statement. The exodus is presumably the IMB's largest departure ever over one issue.

An IMB spokesman declined to comment on the BGCT plan.

At least 10 missionaries have shown interest in receiving funds through the new Texas Baptist funding channel. The Texas convention already channels some support to four missionaries who returned to their field.

Brooks said the program will be a cooperative effort between Texas Baptists and Baptists in the host countries who want the former missionaries to return to their fields of service.

The funding channel, approved unanimously by the BGCT's State Missions Commission Aug. 19, will be operational by Oct. 1 if approved by the convention's Executive Board Sept 30. It eventually will become part of a new, as-yet-unnamed missions network of the BGCT.

The State Missions Commission also approved a proposed \$12.18 million 2004 budget for the Church Missions and Evangelism Section, Church Health and Growth Section and the Associational Missions and Administration Section.

The proposed budget included reductions in personnel and program money as a result of a sluggish economy, decreasing returns on investments and the lack of churches following this year's BGCT Adopted Budget, according to David Nabors, chief financial officer.

Each section reduced its budget by about 18 percent, he said. Eleven positions affecting six employees were eliminated from the three sections.

Several offices were consolidated in an effort to save money. Counseling

and psychological services, the Texas Baptist Leadership Center and the minister/church relations office will become the Center for Christian Leadership. Church Personnel Information Services and ChurchLife Resources will become the Church/Membership Resourcing Area.

The Center for Community Ministries and Mission Service Corps are combining to form the Mission Equipping Center, and the prayer and spiritual development office is moving into the Missional Church Strategy Center.

BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade indicated morale among employees was down, but they are determined to continue their ministry despite the reduction in force and funds.

Board members followed Wade's words with a prayer for the staff as it works through the loss of co-workers and funding.

Brooks thanked the commission for keeping the staff in their thoughts and for understanding the need for cutbacks.

The BGCT Administrative Committee will consider the budget recommendation at its Sept. 4-5 meeting. The BGCT Executive Board will consider the proposed budget and missionary funding mechanism during its Sept. 30 meeting. The convention will vote on the recommended budget during the annual session Nov. 10-11 in Lubbock.

In other business, the commission elected new officers. Ed Seay, pastor of First Baptist Church in Magnolia, was elected chairman. Vice chairman will be Bill Ingram, interim minister of music at First Baptist Church in Huffman. Eunice Chambless of First Baptist Church in Abilene was re-elected as secretary.

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