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TOGETHER: For Texas' sake, fund new churches

Does Texas need more churches? Absolutely. We will have 1.7 million more people in Texas over the next five years. And if we do not meet them with the gospel and give them a place to belong in the body of Christ, we will be found negligent in our response to Christ's command.



The BGCT Church Multiplication Center's "Genesis Project" goal is to help start 777 churches in three years. Since the project was launched in 2002, the center has resourced the starting of 372 churches. But our ability to continue helping start churches depends on more mission dollars through the Cooperative Program and the Mary Hill Davis Offering.

Recently, Abe Zabaneh, director of the Church Multiplication Center, spoke to our Texas Baptist Missions Foundation about why we need more churches. He identified five reasons:

- ◆ New churches are a force for reaching people for Christ. In 2002, our Church Multiplication Center resourced 456 churches-264 churches started that year and 192 other recent starts. Those churches in 2002 had about 40,000 members and baptized about 8,000 people-one person reached and baptized for every five members per year.

Established churches must minister to and care for the members they already have, while new churches have to focus on reaching people. If an established church wants to keep on growing, it has to start new units, get more people involved in leadership and free up the time of some of their ministers to focus on new people. It is easy to be consumed with the task of caring for those who are already in Christ.

- ◆ New churches provide a focus on the future. Texas is changing. Our population is growing at a rapid pace. But the changes also are reflected in the ethnicity, in the languages spoken (about 120 now) and in the variety of cultures. New churches can be planted that are specifically designed to reach out to this diverse population.

- ◆ New churches are a forum for innovation. A new Texas Baptist church for Arabs in Houston recently began publishing a newspaper in Arabic. It is the first Arabic newspaper to be published in Texas, and it may be the first Arabic evangelical newspaper in the United States. Many of the new things now experienced in long-established churches in Texas began in the new emerging churches.

- ◆ New churches are a factory for leadership. A year and a half ago, Cross Trails Baptist Church was started in Fairlie. The church was started by two young men at First Baptist Church of Commerce, where they were challenged to go out and “do ministry.” These cowboys began a Bible study that later became a church. At the one-year anniversary, 467 people attended, cowboy hats, boots and pickup trucks all in great supply.

◆ New churches are a foundation for growth for our Baptist family in Texas. Peter Wagner has observed: “Without exception, the growing denominations have been those that stress church planting.” For our Baptist family to grow in Texas, we must start at least 171 churches a year. We want to do more than simply grow. We want to reach our state and its people for Christ. That is why our goals are more and our need for prayer, people and resources will continue to rise.

We are loved.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.