

# **CECB recommends Executive Board to ask HBU to end ties with SBCT\_53104**

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*Texas Baptist Communications*

DALLAS-The Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Education Coordinating Board wants Houston Baptist University to rescind a "fraternal relationship" it established last year with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

Coordinating board members recommended the BGCT Executive Board ask the university to sever its relationship with the competing state convention. And the coordinating board voted to escrow most BGCT funds budgeted for HBU beginning June 1.

Money earmarked for students through "ministerial financial aid" will not be affected by the proposed escrow.

The BGCT budgeted about \$750,000 for HBU this year, including about \$169,000 for ministry students.

The actions came in response to a September 2003 decision by university

trustees to establish a fraternal relationship with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, a group that broke away from the BGCT in 1998.

The university made the decision almost two years after agreeing to "maintain a unique affiliation with the BGCT by not affiliating or establishing a formal relationship with other denominations, conventions or religious entities."

HBU President Doug Hodo said he did not want to respond to the coordinating board's recommendation until he received it in writing.

Messengers to the 2003 BGCT annual meeting approved a motion instructing the Christian Education Coordinating Board to "evaluate the implications" of the university's relationship with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and "clarify" its status with the BGCT.

The motion by Robert Creech of University Baptist Church in Houston instructed the coordinating board to report to the BGCT Executive Board at its May 25 meeting.

A six-person Christian Education Coordinating Board review committee brought its findings and recommendations to the coordinating board May 17.

The committee said HBU's fraternal relationship with the SBTC "violates the spirit and intent" of the BGCT's agreement with the university.

"HBU has chosen to relate to a convention that has been publicly critical of the BGCT, that holds certain differing values and convictions from those expressed by the BGCT, and that has openly encouraged churches to divert Cooperative Program funds in ways that have negatively impacted all of the ministries of the BGCT, including the affiliated and related institutions," the committee report states.

HBU is the only BGCT-affiliated university with such a SBTC relationship, but the committee and the board expressed a great deal of concern about the implications of the HBU decision on all BGCT institutions.

Keith Bruce, coordinator of BGCT's institutional ministries, said later that most—if not all—BGCT-affiliated universities have been approached about establishing fraternal relationships with SBTC. The efforts have come both from SBTC representatives and from alumni and other constituents wishing to pull the universities in that direction.

"Failure on the part of the BGCT to address this violation of the relationship agreement ... would set a precedent for our other educational and ministry institutions that would not be in the best interests of the BGCT and those institutions," the report states.

At the report's core was the committee's finding that "there was no ambivalence or ambiguity in the language and intent" expressed in the agreement between HBU and the BGCT. "The BGCT entered into the relationship agreement with HBU in good faith and HBU freely signed and entered into" the agreement, it says.

The BGCT Executive Board will consider four recommendations regarding HBU when it meets May 25:

Affirm the review committee report.

- ◆ Reaffirm the relationship agreement established in 2001 between the BGCT and HBU.
- ◆ Ask the university to rescind its decision to relate to SBTC.
- ◆ Affirm the decision to escrow budgeted funds and evaluate the level of future funding for HBU.

The HBU trustees approved the fraternal relationship with SBTC on Sept. 23, 2003. The resolution sealing the relationship stated the university's desire to "reach out to all Texas Baptists and likewise for all Texas Baptists to reach out" to the school.

It also affirmed the university's "unique affiliation and relationship" with the BGCT, as well as a "desire to be open to other Baptist entities in ways that will honor and not violate this unique affiliation."

The SBTC has two qualifications for institutions and organizations to establish a fraternal relationship, according to information given to the Christian Education Coordinating Board. The first is that such institutions "hold a high view of Scripture," and the second is that they "be in basic agreement with Southern Baptist distinctives."

The proposal that went to the HBU trustees was more detailed and included a listing of specific ways the SBTC and HBU might work together. While restating the university's affiliation with the BGCT, it described a fraternal relationship as being "based on a sense of brotherhood, recognizing common bonds of beliefs and aims."

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