

Executive director continues 'accountability tour'_51605

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Executive director continues 'accountability tour'

By Marv Knox

Editor

FORT WORTH—Charles Wade continued his statewide “accountability tour” with a trip to his old stomping grounds early this month.

Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, met with pastors and laypeople from throughout Tarrant County and points west at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth. Before taking the BGCT post five years ago, he was pastor in nearby Arlington for 23 years.

Wade and the crowd discussed the BGCT’s impending reorganization and how it might impact Texas for Christ.



Joel
McCoy,
pastor of
First
Baptist
Church
in
Crowley,
visits
with
BGCT
Executive
Director
Charles
Wade.
(Photo by
Ferrell
Foster)

The reorganization began last year. First, the convention adopted a new set of statements that detail the BGCT's mission, vision, values and priorities. Last fall, messengers to the convention's annual meeting approved the first reading of bylaw amendments that would change how the convention is governed. To take effect, those changes must be approved again at the annual meeting this fall. And the reorganization will be complete when Wade restructures the convention staff to implement the new guidelines and policies.

Wade reminded the Fort Worth crowd he had pledged to go on the road to talk with Texas Baptists about all the changes as well as to listen to their concerns.

"I want to be accountable not only to God but to the people across Texas,"

he said. “I promised to go throughout the state to listen and answer questions.”

The Fort Worth rally was the sixth of a dozen such “listening sessions,” which began in February and will end in October.

Wade stressed the purpose of the convention reorganization—the most ambitious convention makeover in almost 50 years—is to strengthen churches so that strong churches expand Christ’s kingdom.

“The churches don’t exist for the convention,” he insisted. “The convention exists for the sake of the churches, and that’s what this is about.”

He pointed to the words of the Apostle Paul in the second letter to the Corinthians as an important theme for the churches and the BGCT. The apostle emphasized the “ministry of reconciliation” and the “message of reconciliation,” he said, adding that means “doing the gospel” in both preaching and meeting human needs.

“The best gift we have to give anybody is Jesus. But if you give people Jesus, you better be ready to act like that,” Wade added, noting Jesus said Christians minister to him when they serve “the least of these,” such as the hungry, the naked, the prisoners and the sick.

“We’ve reached boocoodles of people” by meeting their physical needs and telling them about Jesus’ love for them, he said.

Wade spoke for about an hour and 15 minutes, describing in detail the new mission, vision, values and priority statements, as well as the proposed changes in governance and the kind of staff reorganization he anticipates.

The governance changes, which would reduce the size of the BGCT Executive Board from 234 members to 90 members and change how they are selected, has drawn some criticism. Baptists in West Texas and rural

East Texas have expressed concern that they may not be as well-represented on the governing board.

The committee designing governance has re-worked the proposal, seeking to balance representation between the convention's current membership base, which mirrors the state's population mass along the Interstate 35 corridor and around Houston, and fairness to longtime faithful churches in rural areas, Wade said. He predicted Texas Baptists would see the balance and fairness in the new proposal.

"I could live with any form of governance as long as it's honest and accountable," he said. "But what I could not live with is if we don't win Texas for Jesus."

Principle initiatives in the staff reorganization will include creating a call-in service center to provide easy access to convention resources, as well as placement of BGCT staff across the state, instead of centralized in the Baptist Building in Dallas.

Acknowledging some directors of missions in district associations have expressed concern about placement of BGCT staff on their fields of service, Wade reported: "I've said to the DOMs, 'If your goal is to help your churches be great churches, the BGCT is going to be the best friend and ally and partner you've got.' Most DOMs are very supportive. But in those rare places where the DOMs won't work with us, well, we'll have to work directly with the churches."

Wade field questions for another 20 to 30 minutes, answering inquiries about the cost of BGCT university education, ethnic ministry and integration of non-Anglo Texas Baptists in the governance process, how the Executive Board will be downsized and how the various regions of the state will be represented on the Executive Board.

"I am celebrating the fact we are looking forward and not backward," Wade

concluded. "Texas Baptists are about the future."

Pointing to the BGCT's "greatest threat," he said: "It's not apathy. It's not ignorance. It's the wonder so many young Baptists have whether there is a need for a convention or not. ... If we didn't have a convention, we'd be sitting here trying to figure out how we can do together what we cannot do alone."

Prior to the Fort Worth session, Wade met with Texas Baptists in Dallas, Midland/Odessa, Amarillo, Texas City and Corpus Christi. Later, he will meet with similar groups in Beaumont, as well as the Wichita/Archer/Clay, El Paso, Creath-Brazos, Rio Grande and Guadalupe associations.

Wade cited four reasons why he's conducting the statewide sessions.

"An informed Baptist is a cooperative Baptist," he said. "My daddy told me that many years ago, and I've found it to be true.

"Second, I promised I would do this. Third, we're still learning. We're trying to listen very carefully to incorporate the good ideas that are being given.

"And finally, I love meeting with Baptist people. I feed off their passion for God's work."

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