

Growth in non-Anglo churches shows BGCT's diversity_50205

April 28, 2005
Posted: 4/29/05

Growth in non-Anglo churches shows BGCT's diversity

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DALLAS-The Baptist General Convention of Texas is becoming more diverse as the state's population becomes more varied, convention statistics reveal.

The Texas population has risen 32.5 percent in the past 14 years, demographic information shows. In that time span, Anglos have dropped from 60 percent of the population to about 50 percent, while Hispanics have grown from 26 percent to 35 percent.

The African-American population has dropped from 12 percent of the Texas population to 11 percent during that same time period. A category of "other" ethnicities increased from 2 percent to 4 percent of the state's residents.

All four categories-Anglo, African-American, Hispanic and "other"-experienced numeric population growth.

The BGCT has experienced similar change during the last 10 years. Anglo congregations made up 63 percent of BGCT-affiliated churches in 2004,

down from 75 percent in 1994. Hispanic congregations made up 20 percent of BGCT churches in 2004, up from 14 percent 10 years ago.

The percentage of African-American and “other” ethnicities is up as well. African-American churches have grown from 7 percent to 12 percent, while other ethnic congregations have moved from 4 percent to 5 percent of the BGCT.

Clay Price, BGCT statistician, said the data reflects a positive trend for the convention as it tries to come in line with the demographics of the state.

“We are still a little bit heavy on the Anglo side,” he said. “We have a bit to go with Hispanics.”

The diversification of the convention has been aided by recent church-starting efforts. New congregations account for 37 percent of BGCT-affiliated Hispanic congregations, 32 percent of African-American churches and 30 percent of “other” ethnic churches. In contrast, new congregations make up only 8 percent of Anglo congregations.

Since 2000, the BGCT has facilitated 422 Hispanic church starts, 296 new Anglo congregations, 223 African-American church starts and 83 new congregations for other ethnicities.

The influx of new BGCT-affiliated congregations creates a stronger need for the convention to connect with leaders, Price said. Ministers in new BGCT churches may need help understanding all the ways the convention can assist their ministries.

“There are a lot of implications about helping these new guys understand who we are, how we can help,” he said.

The BGCT also has become more diverse as a result of the churches that have chosen to end their affiliation with the convention.

More than 800 congregations—most of which are Anglo churches—have left the BGCT for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention since 2000, mathematically dropping the Anglo percentage in the BGCT and increasing the proportion of minority congregations.

Lynn Eckeberger, coordinator of the BGCT Church Health and Growth Section, said the challenge for Texas Baptists is working together in a way that best accomplishes God's mission of reconciling Texans to himself.

Finding a way of serving together may mean altering churches' traditional approaches of ministering cross-culturally, he said. Ethnic groups need to encourage and learn from each other, utilizing the best of what each has to offer.

Communities are changing demographically, Eckeberger noted.

Together, Texas Baptists can better serve that fluid environment.

“We have another challenge,” he said. “That is to respond to the remix of the Texas population.”

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