

EDITORIAL: Go Away, Walk Away & the big picture

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Many Texas Baptists have responded to [the church starting scandal](#) in the Rio Grande Valley in either of two ways. Some just want it to go away. Others think they might just walk away.

The Go Away and the Walk Away positions are understandable. But they're too narrow and will not lead the Baptist General Convention of Texas where God wants us to go.



Most people can relate to the folks who want this problem to just Go Away. Many Christians instinctively turn away from scandal and shy away from conflict. They realize scandal and conflict divert unbelievers from Christ, dissipate the enthusiasm of immature Christians and even discourage mature Christians. So, they believe the best plan is to pretend these difficulties don't exist, or, failing that, to quit talking about them as quickly

as possible. Several inherent weaknesses accompany this approach:

- **Just because you won't name it doesn't mean it's not there.** This is the “elephant in the room” syndrome. Relationships strain and integrity frays when people in a community—family, church or convention—ignore the obvious. As a family grows increasingly sick and dysfunctional because nobody will talk about Uncle John's alcoholism, a convention will decline if it ignores a moral problem, such as deception and waste of missions money.

- **Public sin calls for public atonement.** The Bible is chock-full of cautionary tales about public sin that festered, multiplied and killed until the sinner publicly repented. What's more, Jesus cared so much about sin and discord within the church that he insisted reconciliation should be achieved before worship is resumed (Matthew 5:23-24). He offered a step-by-step pattern for dealing with sin within the church (Matthew 18:15-17). Jesus didn't shirk responsibility to confront scandal or shy away from conflict. The notion that confrontation has no place in the church is not based on the teachings and actions of Christ.

- **Trust will not return until credibility is restored.** This is a key issue for the BGCT. Churning change that consumed the convention in recent years left nerves on edge. Now, with the scent of scandal burning in our nostrils, many Texas Baptists don't trust each other enough to move forward together. We must deal with these issues and form a foundation to believe in each other again.

If you think Go Away is bad, Walk Away would be even more damaging—to the BGCT and to the kingdom of God.

The murmur of Walk Away has been on the lips of what seems to be an increasing number of youngish pastors and can-do laypeople in some of the convention's stronger churches for awhile. Fed up with what they describe as disorganized reorganization, sluggish responsiveness and a rudderless

ship, they tend to think they would be better off going it alone. Their thinking reflects denominational discord, generational shifts and social trends.

The danger now is that scandal might provide the excuse some need to walk. They can tell themselves they already have the resources they need to “do church” and practice missions. In fact, the creeping temptation is to transfer funds that historically supported convention causes into programs and ministries of the church. This tragedy transcends finances. If these churches slip away from active involvement, the convention will lose the impact of vibrant, creative congregations, ministers and laypeople.

And for all their vibrancy, the Walk Aways are missing the big picture:

- **They equate the BGCT Executive Board with the BGCT itself.** This is understandable; we often use the terms interchangeably. But the Executive Board and its staff compose but one component of a much larger convention, which includes 5,700 churches as well as more than two dozen agencies and institutions. To be sure, the Executive Board has been the focal point of reorganization, which has been slow, uneven and mind-numbingly frustrating. But that’s not the whole convention.
- **They’re inclined to throw the baby out with the bath water.** Even though the Executive Board has had its troubles, it’s still an organization of tremendous potential. Its vision needs to be refined, and its resources must be focused. But with the help of Texas Baptists and committed staff, it can provide resources and connectivity for the convention.
- **The sum is still substantial.** Beyond the Executive Board, the BGCT’s institutional life is unparalleled. Together, we’re educating the next generation of leaders, preparing ministers, meeting human need, respecting our elders, healing the sick and doing mission work all around the world. Churches that walk away from the BGCT could distance

themselves from these wonderful ministries, diminishing the churches' blessings and the ministries' impact.

This is why the Executive Board members, who [meet Monday, Nov. 13](#), must act decisively to respond to the scandal, restore trust and move the BGCT forward.

The problem won't go away, and we must not walk away.

--Marv Knox is editor of the Baptist Standard.

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.