

# Restoration of trust is vital, BGCT leaders agree

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**By Barbara Bedrick**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

DALLAS—Baptist General Convention of Texas leaders agree: Restoring trust is a primary task in 2007.

“The wound is deep, and it’s still fresh,” said BGCT President Michael Bell, referring to misuse of BGCT church starting funds in the Rio Grande Valley.

“There are real people who are very hurt, and it is real important that the hurt is addressed. There’s major work to be done in the Valley, and the BGCT needs to do a lot of listening.”

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Bell joined newly elected BGCT President Steve Vernon, Executive Director Charles Wade and Executive Board Chairman Bob Fowler at a news conference during the BGCT annual meeting in Dallas.

Stressing that the BGCT needs to find ways to partner with its affiliated churches in the Valley, Bell affirmed the Executive Board plan to put new procedures in place such as an internal audit and making church starting guidelines policy.

“There’s major work to be done in the Valley, and the BGCT needs to do a lot of listening,” Bell said. “We need to find out ways we can partner with them, because I know a lot of people are hurt in the Valley.”

Vernon, pastor of First Baptist Church in Levelland, echoed Bell’s sentiments, saying he realizes how the BGCT responds to the Valley investigation will be important in his term.

“I have real confidence in the reorganization of the Executive Board and think they’re prepared to handle the investigation,” Vernon said. “It will demand we listen. A lot of people have been doing good work for a lot of years. We need to affirm those pastors.”

Bell said Vernon will make an excellent president because he has made a point to meet with Texas Baptists and attend countless meetings during his tenure as first vice president.



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“I’m excited about what’s ahead for us,” Vernon said. “West Texans have a heart for missions, the BGCT and giving.”

Strategic changes in the way the BGCT operates will be a significant step in placing the organization in a better position of restoring trust, Bell and Vernon agreed.

Texas Baptists are caring people, and the developments this year have made them more concerned about how the convention does business and how the convention ought to be, Bell noted.

“We have a lot of hurt feelings, and I am asking for a chance to get it done,” Wade said.

The Executive Board considered a vote of confidence in the executive director, but Wade told the board he considered any such vote premature, Fowler reported.

“If I get it fixed, then you can express your appreciation for that,” Wade said.

While leaders must give focused attention to problems revealed by the church starting fund investigation, Vernon said, the kingdom cannot be put on hold. He urged that the BGCT move ahead in missions.

“We have got to keep our eyes on the kingdom, and we have a world to work with,” he said.

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