

EDITORIAL: BGCT prepares for torch to be passed

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Charles Wade's [announced retirement](#) means 2007 will be an exceptional year for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Of course, Wade won't retire as executive director of the BGCT Executive Board until early next year. But several processes that will occur in the coming months will ensure 2007's legacy as a red-letter year in BGCT history: Wade will spend much of the year focusing on work begun during his tenure, seeking to complete several projects. A committee selected by Executive Board and BGCT officers will nominate Wade's successor, who should be elected in early fall. And the executive director-elect should work alongside Wade for three months, seeking to ensure a smooth leadership transition.



So, 2007 will be a pivotal year for the BGCT, as one era ends and another

begins. This doesn't happen often. In the past century, only 14 people have held this post, and that number was padded by three short tenures in the late 1920s and early '30s. Only five leaders have been executive director in the past 54 years, and the impact of each rippled into the tenure of the next one. History teaches us the shadow of Wade's legacy will fall onto the new days of his successor.

At the proper time near his retirement, the Baptist Standard will offer a retrospective of the eight-year Wade administration. Now, however, several items bear remembering.

Almost every Texas Baptist who heard Charles Wade speak since November 1999 heard him urge all of us to "love people up close to Jesus." That phrase encapsules three values deeply engrained in his DNA:

- **Love.** Wade brought a tender pastor's heart to this job. During a long pastoral ministry, he continuously demonstrated his love for people. That love expressed itself most clearly in Mission Arlington, the ministry started while he was pastor of First Baptist Church in Arlington, which demonstrated love for the folks Jesus called "the least of these," who need not only salvation, but also food, clothing, shelter, medical care, counsel and someone to hug them—literally and tightly.

Through these years, he also demonstrated his love for Texas Baptists. He has worked tirelessly to show his love for pastors and church staff, going out of his way and expending time he didn't have to spend time with them. He also has loved the Baptist Building staff unconditionally.

- **People.** If anything, Charles Wade is a people person. About the only thing he loves more than worshipping with people is visiting with them afterward, learning their names and sharing their stories. I have watched him closely when I knew he was bone-weary, and yet he was the picture of energy when he was with people, simply because he adores them.

- **Jesus.** Never doubt that our Savior is the center of Charles Wade's life. One of the defining moments of his tenure happened early on, when he stood on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention—outnumbered by the thousands—to urge the SBC not to remove a vital reference to Jesus from the *Baptist Faith & Message* statement. He didn't do that because he wanted to fight fundamentalism; he did it because he loves Jesus.

Another word that is not included in that phrase but that defines Charles Wade is courage. During the darkest hour of his tenure, he exhibited the courage to invite outside investigators to get to the bottom of the Valley scandal. He also exhibited courage in leading the most significant reorganization of convention governance in a half-century and a major reorganization of Executive Board staff.

The full implications of governance changes will be determined under the leadership of Wade's successor, as will completion of the staff reorganization.

In the meantime, pray for Charles and Rosemary Wade and for the committee that will nominate a successor.

Marv Knox is editor of the Baptist Standard.