

EDITORIAL: Two issues resolved, 3rd straight ahead

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The last time we met on this page, we waited to see how the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board meeting Feb. 26-27 would turn out. The board faced three key issues. It deftly resolved two of them, but the third still stands as Texas Baptists' most crucial challenge:

- **Church-starting scandal.**

A special oversight group presented a positive report on the convention's response to misappropriation of church-starting funds in the Rio Grande Valley. Executive Board staff took the lead and, supported in some cases by Executive Board directors and others, moved to implement all seven recommendations offered by outside investigators who uncovered the extent of the scandal. Although some parts of a few recommendations are not completely functional, progress has been solid. (See story, page 2.)





“Vigilance” is the watchword for moving forward in BGCT church-starting. But Texas Baptists can feel confident lessons have been learned, accountability processes are being put in place and we will benefit from a stronger, more reliable church-starting program.

- **Convention authority.**

Whatever else may be said from the podium of a BGCT annual meeting, messengers never again will hear that the Executive Board has “preempted” their authority. Responding to a ruling like that last year, the board approved a “statement of understanding” that declares: “This board does not intend in any way for its actions prior to an annual meeting to ‘preempt’ the role of messengers. Rather, this board seeks to perform its duties faithfully between annual meetings.” And lest a parliamentarian ever be tempted to rule otherwise, the board also proposed a constitutional amendment that clarifies the point (See story).

- **Leadership/future.**

Responding to scandal and correcting a parliamentary loophole are easy fixes compared to meeting the conjoined challenge of the convention’s leadership and future.

The previous editorial reported, “Texas Baptists openly speculate about the tenure of Charles Wade, the Executive Board’s executive director.” Many

Texas Baptists wish those words weren't written, and I didn't enjoy writing them. But denying an open secret doesn't make it go away, and dysfunction does a disservice to our Texas Baptist family. Some Texas Baptists are upset because the Valley scandal happened on Charles Wade's watch. Others are frustrated by the pace, order and shape of convention reorganization. Wade is a seasoned pastor, and he understands leading through calamity and change means picking up baggage as well as dealing with people who don't like how things are done.

Still, the duration of the executive director's tenure rests with the Executive Board and the executive director himself. The Executive Board's Executive Committee met with him behind (appropriately) closed doors for slightly more than an hour. When they emerged, nobody discussed retirement or tenure issues.

So, Charles Wade is the executive director until further notice. Many Texas Baptists will continue to speculate regarding his tenure. (A favorite denominational church-parlor game involves two parts—speculating about when leaders will leave and speculating about who will succeed them.) In the meantime, his job is guiding Texas Baptists past a church-starting scandal and a parliamentary tangle and into the future. He's giving every intention he intends to stay on the job.

That's an ever-challenging task, because the BGCT's future is anything but certain.

Like it or not, the BGCT is a denominational behemoth in a post-denominational age. Trend lines are running against denominational structures, especially conventions. Some futurists even see a time when state conventions no longer exist. Many historically loyal churches already act as if state conventions don't exist.

Still, despite technology, rapid travel, innovation and the strength and

flexibility of many churches, the age-old adage remains true: We can do more together than we can do alone.

That's the reason the Baptist General Convention of Texas has a future. Or perhaps I should say, it can have a future if it envisions that future with creativity, courage, compassion and conviction.

Texas Baptists face some God-sized tasks we can accomplish only if we work together under the power of God.

But that will require crafting a completely different kind of convention. We'll discuss this in the next edition. Hint: It begins by poking a hole in an old bromide: "The convention exists for the churches."

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