

# Former pastor returns money to congregation; church agrees to give funds to BGCT

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**By John Hall**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

DALLAS—The former pastor of First Baptist Church in Weslaco has returned to his former congregation the Baptist General Convention of Texas church-starting funds he used in a questionable manner, and the church has agreed in principle to return the money to the convention.

BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade revealed Nov. 9 on the BGCT blog that the convention and First Baptist Church are in the process of finalizing an agreement on the return of \$26,550.

The BGCT has agreed not to seek the recuperation of funds above \$26,550, which matches the amount sent to First Baptist Church in Weslaco to start a church, The Family Fellowship, he reported.

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The funds were allocated to First Baptist Church to start a congregation that was designed to originate as a third worship service at First Baptist Church. Most of the membership of First Baptist Church never understood it was starting another congregation, and former Pastor Jonathan Becker claimed the BGCT funds as a salary supplement for leading the new church.

Becker noted he have gave the money to First Baptist Church in Weslaco of his own accord without the congregation or the convention asking for it. While figures higher than \$26,550 have been attributed to what Becker claimed as a salary subsidy, Becker said the \$26,550 represents all the money he received. BGCT records also show the convention sent First Baptist Church in Weslaco \$26,550 for the Family Fellowship.

The BGCT helps fund as much as 50 percent of new church budgets and allows congregations to make decisions on how to best use that money, officials noted.

Since the allegations of misappropriation arose, Becker has resigned as pastor of First Baptist Church in McAllen, where he went to serve after leaving First Baptist Church in Weslaco.

In a letter to leaders of First Baptist Church in Weslaco, Wade thanked the congregation for its efforts to return the money.

“Your willingness to initiate this response without any urging from us speaks clearly about the wonderful character and integrity of your people,” he wrote.

In his blog post, Wade noted the misuse of church-starting funds happened

under guidelines that have since been revised and improved.

“Our new policies and guidelines outlined in our new church starting manual will minimize the risk of misuse of church starting funds,” he wrote. “Our whole process has been changed and improved. And if someone does try to inappropriately use church starting funds of the BGCT, we will be able to know it quickly and respond appropriately.”

BGCT church starters meet more frequently with church planters, sponsoring churches and associational representatives now. They ask church planters about specific areas of new church development, including the development of contributors and finances. When answers don't meet expectations or gaps appear, BGCT church starters take a deeper look at the situation.

The BGCT is making every attempt to handle each donated dollar in a way to honors God, Wade stressed.

“Every dollar any one of our members gives through our churches is precious to God and to every pastor,” he wrote. “Every dollar given by any one of our churches or missions is precious to God and to me.”

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