Motion calls for committee with 2020 vision

October 19, 2007
Posted: 10/19/07

Motion calls for committee with 2020 vision

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Editor

Messengers to the 2007 Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting will be asked to create a committee to define the BGCT's "shared vision" for the coming 12 years.

Ed Jackson, a member of the convention's Executive Board and a layman from First Baptist Church in Garland, has announced he will present the proposal during the annual meeting in Amarillo Oct. 29-30.

Jackson's motion calls for the BGCT president and Executive Board chairman to "appoint a committee of no more than 25 members to consider our shared vision of the Baptist General Convention of Texas for the year 2020."

If approved, the committee will report to the Executive Board at its February, May and September meetings next year and present a formal report to the convention at its 2008 November session.

The motion instructs the committee to:

• Study, analyze and project income from all sources for the BGCT between 2008 and 2020, including factors that influence cooperative giving.

• Address the relationship between the BGCT and its institutions, as well as set priorities for programs supplied by the Executive Board staff.

• Study the changing missions strategy of the BGCT's congregations and how that strategy connects with programs operated by Executive Board staff.

• Analyze the impact of innovation on Texas Baptist ministries and the sustainability of convention programs.

"The purpose of this committee is to use our resources in the best possible way to win Texas and the world to Jesus Christ as Savior and to encourage and support the ministries he has called us to do," the motion states.

Jackson began to develop the idea for a comprehensive convention strategy study as he listened to the Executive Board discuss the convention's 2008 budget during its fall meeting in late September. He recalled the last BGCT study of this magnitude launched in 1995, when messengers authorized the Effectiveness & Efficiency Committee.

"It dawned on me it has been 12 years since we made a detailed examination of what we are doing. That's too long," he said in an interview. "It's amazing how much the world has changed in the past 12 years—and how much it will change in the next 12 years."

The Executive Board cannot effectively conduct such a study, primarily because the 90-member board doesn't have time to take on this task amid its other assignments, said Jackson, a retired electronics industry executive. He spent eight years working in the Baptist Building as a Mission Service Corps volunteer providing leadership to the Continuous Quality Improvement organizational effectiveness program.

The time for this study also is right because the convention is seeking a new executive director to replace Charles Wade, who retires Jan. 31, Jackson said.

“The new executive director will have ideas of his own, but he will be someone who listens to a diverse group of voices. And we need to hear what they’re saying,” he explained. “So, what better time? We’ll have a new executive director coming on board. The committee will hear him, and he will hear them, and we will march forward.”

An analysis of BGCT income and resources is vital for the convention’s future, Jackson said.

“We must use our resources in the best way possible. That’s the whole object,” he said. “We always know our resources are limited. Let’s use them for the best possible impact.”

Likewise, a study of the relationship between the convention and its institutions is overdue, he added.

“Our Baptist institutions are the part of the convention most Baptists identify with,” he said, noting ministries such as universities and children’s homes touch the hearts of Texas Baptists.

“That’s what keeps us together. We identify with these institutions. We also identify with Texas Baptist Men when they’re out on disaster relief. They are important to every Baptist. So, we need to highlight them.”

Jackson hopes the committee will lead the BGCT to increase the percentage of its receipts allocated to the institutions each year through 2020. Similarly, the convention has a vested interest in understanding and collaborating with local churches’ developing missions strategy, Jackson insisted.

“I am convinced that actual missions giving has gone up appreciably in the last few years. It’s just not being channeled through our cooperative giving plan,” he said.

Illustrating how Texas Baptists’ involvement in missions is increasing even as Cooperative Program receipts decline, Jackson cited his own church.

“Our church participated in a mission trip to Brazil (organized) by local churches in Dallas. But that never will be reported as cooperative giving,” he said. “Our church also built two houses for a church on the Texas/Mexico border, but that was not reported, either.

“It’s not that we’re not giving to missions. We’re giving in a new way, and it’s obviously a new strategy. I’m not saying that’s bad at all. But we can benefit by coordinating our efforts and connecting our missions commitment to missions needs.”

The call to analyze innovation and sustainability is a key to success for the endeavor, Jackson said. Technological innovation—particularly in communication and coordination—can make convention staff more productive, even in a downsized configuration, he predicted.

“Too often, as I look over past motions and recommendations, they resulted in increased population in the Baptist Building,” he said. “There are things we can streamline and do more effectively, if we study them carefully.

“And ‘sustainability’ is the key word. We can’t start something that’s not sustainable. We need to see where we are going and what we are doing with our programs.”

BGCT President Steve Vernon, who will preside at the Amarillo meeting, said Jackson’s motion is in order and will be presented to messengers for their consideration.

“We certainly welcome the motion,” said Vernon, pastor of First Baptist Church in Levelland. “He’s certainly presenting something for the good of the convention.”

Executive Board Chairman Bob Fowler affirmed Jackson’s proposal. “It’s directionally where we ought to go,” said Fowler, a lay member of South Main Baptist Church in Houston.

The strategy committee will face a formidable task, he added.

“Not knowing how—or if—we are going to capture the imagination of the churches to see that we can accomplish more through cooperative giving, it will be hard to predict the resources we will have in coming years,” Fowler explained.

The stakes are high, he acknowledged. “If we can’t inspire more churches to see the benefits of cooperative giving—and there are many benefits—then we will face a significant challenge. …

“So, clearly, we have to be strategic in thinking about where we need to go and how we need to get there.”

John Petty, the Executive Board’s chair-elect, said he appreciates both the spirit and content of Jackson’s motion.

“It’s hard for me to imagine the convention not taking action on that sort of motion,” said Petty, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Kerrville. “We clearly have some budget challenges we’ve got to get over if we’re going to be effective as a convention.

“This study might take us to a place we don’t want to go but we need to go. Nevertheless, if we as a convention will decide to go there together, we’ll get where God wants us to be.”

Jackson conceded the year 2020 sounds like a long way off, but he noted

now is the time to ensure the convention is where it needs to be in a dozen years.

“The BGCT is like a big battleship, and you’re not going to turn it around in just a few years,” he said. “Let’s do this as seamlessly as we can—and get to where we want to be in 12 years.”

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