

EDITORIAL: Fresh beginning & the way forward

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Humans naturally gravitate to beginnings. It's no coincidence New Year's Eve is the biggest party night of the year. Weddings and the birth of babies are the most significant events in almost every family's history. Grand openings and the first games of a new season always draw huge crowds. In churches, building dedications inevitably mark milestone moments.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is no exception. And so the election of a new executive director stands out for its singularity. The BGCT Executive Board selected Randel Everett for that role Feb. 26. The eyes of Texas Baptists now look toward March 31, when Everett begins his tenure and the convention enters a new era.



Newness always highlights possibility. Every team is a potential champion on Opening Day. Every child is a potential president, Oscar winner, star

athlete, life-changing leader and life-giving healer on the day of its birth.

The BGCT executive director is no exception. As Everett prepares to take up the mantle of leadership, Texas Baptists look ahead with longing. We're ready for hope. In the past decade, many BGCT churches left to affiliate with a competing convention. The fallout of 9/11 wreaked financial havoc. An overall decline in denominationalism sapped energy and enthusiasm. A church-starting scandal siphoned trust. Tight budgets and staff layoffs eroded confidence and optimism.

Church of England short on Bibles

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Church of England short on Bibles

By Al Webb

Religion News Service

LONDON (RNS)—The Church of England has discovered a shortage of a basic piece of equipment it really cannot afford to do without—an adequate supply of Bibles for its churches.

The church's General Synod recently voted to ensure that everyone visiting a church should have "easy and unfettered access" to a Bible, after

delegates complained many churches were failing to make them available.

BGCT board allocates funds, approves missions partnership, hears reports

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BGCT board allocates funds, approves missions partnership, hears reports

By Marv Knox

Editor

The Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board handled a broad range of business during a day dominated by the election of a new executive director.

After the board chose Randel Everett to succeed Charles Wade as the convention's staff leader Feb. 26, members turned their attention to an agenda that ranged from money to missions and institutions to internal audits.

Faith Digest

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Faith Digest

***Amazing Grace* takes top honors.** *Amazing Grace*, the big-budget film that traced the life of abolitionist William Wilberforce, won Most Inspiring Movie of 2007 and Best Movie for Mature Audiences at the 16th annual Movieguide Faith and Values Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. The film stars Ioan Gruffudd as Wilberforce, a member of Parliament who fought to end the slave trade in the 18th century British Empire. The historical drama was awarded the \$50,000 Epiphany Prize, sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation, which provides \$100,000 annually to films and television shows that reflect a “dramatic increase in either man’s love of God or man’s understanding of God,” according to the Epiphany Prizes’ website.

Jehovah’s Witnesses fastest-growing faith in America. Jehovah’s Witnesses are the fastest-growing church body in the United States and Canada, with more than 1 million members, according to new figures that track church membership. The 2008 Yearbook of Canadian and American Churches, produced by the National Council of Churches, recorded growth trends in 224 national church bodies with a combined membership of 147 million Americans, based on self-reported membership figures for 2006, the

most recent year available. Although Jehovah's Witnesses ranked 24th on the list of 25 largest churches, they reported the largest growth rate—2.25 percent—of all churches. The badly divided Episcopal Church, meanwhile, reported the largest drop, at 4.15 percent.

Americans fluid in their religious affiliation, Pew study reveals

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Americans fluid in their religious affiliation, Pew study reveals

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—If you're Buddhist in the United States, you're most likely a white convert who lives in the American West. If you're a Jehovah's Witness, you're likely to be a white Southerner, but almost half of your fellow believers are either African-American or Hispanic. And if you're a Midwesterner, you're living in the region that best reflects the religious diversity of America.

A new study of more than 35,000 adult Americans by the [Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life](#) captures the depth and breadth of religious America—78.4 percent Christian, 4.7 percent members of other faiths and 16.1 percent unaffiliated.

Grassley targets ministries’ alleged abuse of tax laws

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Grassley targets ministries’ alleged abuse of tax laws

By Robert Marus

Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (ABP)—[Sen. Chuck Grassley](#) insists that he’s not trying to impose his Baptist theology on Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries; he simply wants them to obey the tax laws.

The Iowa Republican has drawn fire for using his position as ranking minority member of the Senate Finance Committee to investigate six ministries—most of them embracing so-called “prosperity gospel” theology—for their financial habits.

Online site tackles self-destructive behaviors

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Online site tackles self-destructive behaviors

By Morgan Jerema

Religion News Service

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (RNS)—In spite of depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder that have nagged her since she was a teenager, 20-year-old Krissee is determined to keep the self-destructive manifestations of both conditions in check.

It hasn't been easy, said Krissee, who asked that her last name not be used.

IN BETWEEN: Turning Texas Baptists toward hope

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IN BETWEEN: Turning Texas Baptists toward hope

Something special happened in Texas Baptist life a few days ago. The Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board elected a new leader, Randel Everett, for our work together. It has been awhile since I have experienced such positive affirmation of a decision. And the following day, the BGCT staff gave a jubilant welcome to Randel and his wife, Sheila. These have been exciting days.

Randel's theme for the work of Texas Baptists is summed up in one word—hope. Not just a general feeling of hope, but the kind of hope that comes only through life in Christ. This hope in Christ needs to permeate our individual lives and the work of our churches, associations and the BGCT.



Jeremiah quoted the Lord when God promised to bring Israel back from

Babylon. He said, "For I know the plans I have for you. ... Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Randel's first day with the BGCT will be March 31. As the staff prepares for new leadership, as we prepare for the future, our role is to focus on the calling that God gives your church for reaching a lost Texas, training disciples and ministering in Jesus' name.

On the Move

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- **Mark Borum** has resigned as minister of music and senior adults at First Church in Kingwood and is available for music supply, interims and special events at (281) 682-9556.
- **Clarence Bryce** to New United Church in Greenville as pastor.
- **Tanner Butkay** to Cowboy Fellowship of Atascosa County as minister of youth.
- **Matt Cagle** has resigned as minister of youth at First Church in Cleburne.

When a teen becomes pregnant, what should a youth minister do?

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When a teen becomes pregnant, what should a youth minister do?

By George Henson

Staff Writer

DALLAS—Every youth minister prays it won't happen in his church. But for many, at one time or another, it does. A girl in the youth group announces: "I'm pregnant."

The youth minister's most important words at that point may be the ones left unspoken, counselors at [Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services](#) agreed.

Children's home opens cottages to leadership program for intercultural youth

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Children's home opens cottages to leadership program for intercultural youth

By Vicki Hewitt

South Texas Children's Home

BEEVILLE—Donors' dollars benefited multiple ministries, thanks to a partnership between [South Texas Children's Home](#) and a Baptist General Convention of Texas leadership-training ministry for young people from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

When Dorothy Bobbitt wrote out her check to South Texas Children's Home last year, she thought of the children there and whispered a prayer. Helping provide food, shelter and a loving Christian environment for children who need it always brings her joy. What Bobbitt couldn't know was the other Baptist ministries her dollars would support as God multiplied her investment.

Leadership
Training
Institute
student
leader
Sarah Ven
climbs to
new
heights at
the Zephyr
Baptist
Camp
Ropes
Challenge
Course
during a
special
weekend
retreat at
South
Texas
Children's
Home near
Beeville.

Texas Tidbits

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Texas Tidbits

BGCT mentoring partnership aims to help children of inmates. The Baptist General Convention of Texas is entering a partnership with [Amachi Texas](#) to change the lives of children of incarcerated family members through mentoring.



Nearly 400,000 Texas children have a parent in prison, on parole or on probation. Those young people have a 70 percent likelihood of going to prison, unless there is positive intervention. Through the partnership, the Baptist General Convention of Texas will recruit churches to provide volunteer mentors for young people. Amachi Texas—an initiative of the governor's office, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Texas Workforce Commission and the OneStar Foundation—will train those volunteers how to mentor young people. Research indicates after 18 months with a mentor, young people were 46 percent less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 27 percent less likely to start using alcohol and 52 percent less likely to skip school.

Lubbock ministry joins Buckner. My Father's House, Lubbock, became part of [Buckner Children & Family Services](#) Feb. 22. The ministry provides job training and mentoring in a residential setting for low-income women and their children. Buckner is assuming full operation of the ministry, and My Father's House, Lubbock, will retain its name. Buckner already operates Buckner Children's Home in Lubbock.