

BGCT and NAMB leaders clarify path for church starting

January 10, 2025

DALLAS—Leaders from the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the North American Mission Board agreed in principle to a clear path forward for providing church-starting resources and support for BGCT churches desiring access to NAMB resources.

The two-hour meeting at the BGCT's Dallas office on Jan. 8 marked the culmination of numerous meetings and discussions between pastors and organizational leaders since Julio Guarneri, Texas Baptists' executive director, initially reported on [NAMB support for BGCT-sponsored church starts in Texas](#) during his address to the May 2024 BGCT Executive Board meeting.

Representatives from NAMB and the BGCT previously came together on Aug. 15 in Dallas.

NAMB's trustees and the BGCT's executive board will review the arrangement at their respective February meetings.

While some details still are under discussion, the revised agreement emphasizes four areas:

- The use of "white label" Send Network church starting resources for BGCT churches who desire them. "White label" means taking the branding off of an item so another entity can affix its own branding to the product. Details of how this will happen in this context will be worked out between the two entities.
- The disposition of NAMB's \$300,000 annual church starting grant for

BGCT-sponsored church starts.

- Access to church planter training events for BGCT churches.
- Improved communications with pastors, churches and associations who relate to the BGCT.

The agreement clarified Send Network planting, training and coaching materials will continue to be made available to BGCT churches that support the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and desire to use them, bolstering the resources already on offer through the existing [BGCT church starting process](#).

These resources will afford additional tools and assessment opportunities to BGCT churches that affirm the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and want to start BGCT churches in Texas that affirm the Southern Baptist Convention's statement of faith.

Agreement on new arrangement

While the BGCT will continue to receive an annual grant of \$300,000 from NAMB, moving forward, the dollars—which previously were split with [\\$200,000 for evangelism and \\$100,000 for church starting](#)—will be allocated exclusively for church starting.

The BGCT will request the funds on an as-needed basis for each church start in accordance with [BGCT's](#) and NAMB's church starting funding policies and procedures.

The NAMB funds will be made available through the BGCT to church planters who complete either the Send Network or a similar church starting assessment. Only BGCT churches that align with the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and have given to the SBC Cooperative Program and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering the previous year will be eligible for the

NAMB funding. Churches planted through these funds will affirm the Baptist Faith & Message 2000.

Churches that do not meet NAMB's criteria but do meet the BGCT's criteria will continue to have access to the same BGCT funding they've previously received.

In September, the BGCT Executive Board passed a recommendation from the Missions Funding Council to [increase the maximum amount that may be approved for any new church start](#) from \$75,000 to \$125,000 to further resource new BGCT-sponsored church starts.

The \$300,000 NAMB grant supplements the approximately \$3 million given through the Texas Baptists Cooperative Program, Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions and donor-directed funds the BGCT annually invests in church starting.

The agreement also notes NAMB and BGCT leaders will "explore the possibility of conducting [Church] Planter Pathway training events" for BGCT churches and church starters and work together to ensure "pastors, churches and associations have reliable, true and updated information as to how BGCT churches can relate to NAMB."

Noe Treviño, director of the Texas Baptists Center for Missional Engagement, and George Ross, Send Relief's regional director for the South Region, will work to discuss and plan future training opportunities and resource sharing.

NAMB president Kevin Ezell already is scheduled to host [a series of information sessions](#) with BGCT churches in areas including Dallas/Ft. Worth, Austin, Houston and West Texas to connect with pastors and association leaders and clarify partnership opportunities.

Guarneri expressed his appreciation for the collaborative effort and its

importance for Texas Baptists churches.

“I’m so pleased with the outcome of this process and look forward to working under this renewed agreement in the days ahead,” he said. “While things have changed in the denominational landscape at multiple levels, what hasn’t changed is the need to work together to reach people with the gospel in Texas and North America. It is vital that Texas Baptists churches have clarity on how they can be supported in church starting.”

Support, he said, is available to any church affiliated with the BGCT that meets the appropriate requirements.

“The BGCT is a diverse family of churches that include those who align with the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message, those who align with the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, or similar Baptist confession of faith,” Guarneri said.

“All of these have access to assessment, training, coaching and funding from the BGCT as long as they meet the criteria set forth [by the BGCT] and follow the process.”

Guarneri also pointed to the implications of the arrangement for churches singly aligned with the BGCT that desire to partner with NAMB.

“This agreement specifically addresses churches that desire to have access to NAMB resources, including assessment, training, coaching and funding through the BGCT,” Guarneri said.

“It ensures Texas Baptists churches who meet NAMB requirements and desire to start new congregations receive all the support available while remaining singly aligned with the BGCT.”

Ezell shared optimism about how the new arrangement can boost church planting efforts in Texas.

“NAMB exists to serve Southern Baptist churches, and I believe this updated agreement with the BGCT will strengthen those efforts in Texas. I appreciate the time Julio and his team have taken to work through these details,” Ezell said.

“This is a great example of Southern Baptists coming together and working together for the sake of the gospel.”

Participants in the agreement discussion

Guarneri and Ezell were joined by the following attendees: Rusty Shuler, NAMB’s church relations mobilizer; Jeff Williams, senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Denton; Pete Pawelek, senior pastor of Cowboy Fellowship of Atascosa County; Chad Edgington, senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Olney; Tom Howe, associate director of the Texas Baptists Center for Missional Engagement and director of the Texas Baptists Church Starting Team; Dan Newburg, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Devine; Noe Treviño, director of the Texas Baptists Center for Missional Engagement; Heath Kirkwood, Texas Baptists Executive Board chair and lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Lorena; Craig Christina, Texas Baptists associate executive director; Ronny Marriott, Texas Baptists president and pastor of First Baptist Church in Richardson; Ward Hayes, Texas Baptists treasurer/CFO; and Sergio Ramos, director of Texas Baptists GC2 Initiative.

NAMB’s trustees are scheduled to meet Feb. 3-4 in Long Beach, Calif. The BGCT Executive Board will hold its winter meeting on Feb. 17-18 in Dallas.

Ongoing partnerships

In addition to the church starting arrangement, BGCT and NAMB are continuing to partner to produce [Crossover Dallas](#), the evangelistic effort held in conjunction with the Southern Baptist Convention taking place on

June 8-11 in Dallas and the [Send Relief Ministry Center in Laredo](#).

[More than 1,000 individuals heard gospel presentations](#) when Texas Baptists and NAMB partnered for Serve Tour Brownsville held Oct. 11-12 in the Brownsville area.

“The Texas population continues to grow at a fast rate, and the proportion of people in our state who do not know Christ as Savior and Lord is also growing,” Guarneri said. “We must urgently multiply our efforts in church starting as we seek to strengthen a multiplying movement of Great Commandment and Great Commission churches in Texas and beyond.”

Guarneri said the BGCT is “committed to doing our best to help churches plant churches so that we can win Texas for Christ.”

BGCT churches started more than 30 new churches through the BGCT’s church starting process in 2024.