

BGCT and NAMB leaders discuss bridging gaps

August 20, 2024

Baptist General Convention of Texas and North American Mission Board representatives met at the Texas Baptists' offices Aug. 15.

The meeting [followed-up the exchange](#) between [Dustin Slaton](#), senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Round Rock, and North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Indianapolis.

At the June meeting, Slaton posed a question from the floor to Ezell regarding BGCT churches receiving NAMB funding for church starts in Texas.

In his answer, Ezell expressed a willingness to discuss the relationship between [NAMB and the BGCT](#), while also stating an unwillingness to deviate from NAMB's longstanding commitment to start churches in partnership with state conventions that affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

The who

BGCT pastors who attended the meeting between the two entities included Slaton; Chad Edgington, pastor of First Baptist Church in Olney; Pete Pawelek, senior pastor of Cowboy Fellowship in Jourdanton; and Jeff Williams, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Denton—who also are current BGCT Executive Board directors—and Dan Newburg, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Devine.

BGCT Executive Director Julio Guarneri, Associate Executive Director Craig

Christina and Treasurer/Chief Financial Officer Ward Hayes also participated, along with BGCT Executive Board Chair Bobby Contreras, pastor of Alamo Heights Baptist Church in San Antonio.

Ezell and Rusty Shuler, church relations mobilizer, represented the North American Mission Board. Williams, while not an official liaison, holds leadership roles with the BGCT and NAMB until he concludes BGCT executive board trustee duties in a few months.

Guarneri stated he “genuinely appreciate(s) Kevin’s willingness to come this way and meet with a handful of our Texas Baptists pastors, some of whom also serve with our BGCT Executive Board.

“These pastors have such a strong heart and passion for seeing God’s kingdom advanced in Texas and beyond. I am grateful for their time and attention in this matter. As I’ve said before, there is too much lostness for any one group to think they can do it alone. We all know we are better when we work and minister together.

“I look forward to the continuation of this dialogue as we seek to fill in the gaps and resource our Texas Baptists churches to live out the Great Commission.”

Ezell commented: “It was really a meeting that grew out of Dustin Slaton’s question to me from the floor of the [SBC] annual meeting. We talked by phone a few times and planned to get together in person and then more pastors wanted to join in.

“I appreciated Julio hosting us and being able to spend time with him and the pastors. We are grateful for the generosity of BGCT churches and look forward to continuing to serve them and partner with them,” Ezell said in an email.

Slaton echoed that sense of collegiality stating: “The conversation between

those in the room was honest, cordial and hopeful for a good relationship between the BGCT and NAMB.”

The what

He explained when he asked his question at the SBC annual meeting, he hoped to initiate a dialogue that would improve the partnership between the BGCT and NAMB.

“Thursday’s conversation was a great step in that direction,” Slaton said.

Slaton stated he was “encouraged to find that BGCT churches do have access to NAMB resources, training, personnel and assistance through the church planting process.

“Basically, aside from funding, we have access to anything anyone else has access to, and the funding can possibly come through the \$300,000 NAMB grants to the BGCT, annually.”

He said the meeting gave him hope “we may find ways in the future to see an increase in funding to the BGCT through a re-evaluation of the process.”

Counting giving through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and Cooperative Program contributions to the SBC, Texas Baptists estimate BGCT churches give about \$5.5 million annually to NAMB.

Slaton hopes BGCT churches hear they have access to church planting tools and guidance from both BGCT and NAMB, should they wish to utilize either or both organizations’ resources.

Edgington credits Pawelek with connecting all the parties to ensure the meeting suggested in the Indianapolis exchange actually came to pass.

Pawelek demurred credit, deferring it instead to NAMB and BGCT leaders who made time to come together with concerned pastors. He wanted the

meeting to “get some clarity” and make sure the history of cooperation between NAMB and BGCT continues, he said.

Edgington said everybody in the meeting was kind, and they heard and cleared up misconceptions about the relationship between NAMB and the BGCT, which is complicated by differing statements of faith.

Edgington said Ezell came to listen to the BGCT side, and it was good to hear everything “from the horses’ mouths” on both sides, in an atmosphere of cooperation.

He noted the tendency in Baptist life for the things that get “drummed up” to distract from recognizing what Baptists have in common.

The Why

“Sometimes it’s good to realize that we’re all on the same team,” he continued. “And that there’s massive agreement and a real desire to plant churches and reach people for the gospel on both sides.”

Williams noted in his role as pastor ambassador for the North American Mission Board, he’d had questions come his way from pastors about the relationship between NAMB and the BGCT.

So, he welcomed the opportunity the meeting provided to allay misconceptions about boundaries to cooperation between the two organizations.

Slaton said he expressed appreciation to both Guarneri and Ezell for firmly but graciously expressing the positions and concerns of their respective organizations.

He did not sense pressure to achieve certain changes from either of the represented organizations, stating: “If every issue between differing views

and different groups was handled as well as this meeting, the SBC would be a much better environment. I was proud of both the BGCT and NAMB.”

As the intent of the meeting was dialogue, not action, no actions were taken, and no further conversations have been scheduled—though the pastors and organizational leaders expressed hope dialogue will continue.

Editor’s note: paragraph three was edited and paragraph 19 was added after the article initially was posted to provide clarification and additional information.