

Updated: Broadway Baptist Church discontinues partnership with BGCT

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FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) — A historic Fort Worth church has cut off its 125-year-old relationship with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, saying it doesn't want to be distracted by questions concerning the congregation's position on homosexuality.

[Broadway Baptist Church](#) voted Sept. 8 to approve a letter from Pastor Brent Beasley informing BGCT Executive Director Randel Everett that the congregation will no longer contribute or send messengers to the convention's annual meeting or publicly claim affiliation with the state convention.

Beasley said in an interview Sept. 13 the intent of the decision is "to discontinue our partnership with the BGCT." He said the church will direct the majority of its mission dollars through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and send money directly to Texas Baptist institutions.

The letter, hand-delivered to BGCT offices Sept. 13, said Broadway "will always remain open to future opportunities to partner" with Texas Baptists, but for now the congregation's best option "is to leave denominational

politics and distractions behind and move forward into the future that God has called us to do."

The letter cited "distracting complications we encountered in our attempt to participate in last year's annual meeting and the prospect of future unwanted and unneeded discord." A leading BGCT congregation since the convention's founding in 1886, Broadway Baptist Church decided not to send messengers to the state convention last fall after learning that some individuals planned to challenge their seating because of the church's position on homosexuality.

BGCT Executive Director Randel Everett expressed his sadness at Broadway's decision to discontinue its relationship with the state convention, pointing to its historic contributions to Baptist life.

"We thank God for the relationship that Broadway Baptist Church and the BGCT have had... . It is a sad day for us that we are unable to continue this relationship. I don't know of any congregation that has been more of a strategic partner to Texas Baptists than Broadway. Two former executive directors served as pastors of the church. They have been an example of ministry to the least of those among us. The church was founded in what was called 'Hell's half acre' in Fort Worth because of the challenges of the community. They have continued to reach some of Fort Worth's most prominent and some of the poorest," Everett said.

"We certainly understand the decision of the church and pray that God will continue to bless them. I pray that there will be opportunities in the future for Broadway and the BGCT to partner together in mission and ministry."

In 2009 the Southern Baptist Convention declared Broadway Baptist Church "not in friendly cooperation" based on a constitutional [article](#) that denies membership to churches that "act to affirm, approve, or endorse homosexual behavior."

The vote followed a year-long investigation by the SBC Executive Committee into questions raised by media reports of an internal church controversy over whether to include portraits of same-sex couples alongside other family portraits in a church directory.

The church eventually reached a compromise, but SBC leaders said they were unconvinced that Broadway met membership qualifications added to the denomination's constitution after two churches in North Carolina blessed a same-sex union and licensed a homosexual to the ministry in the early 1990s.

Broadway was the first church to be excluded under the language on homosexuality, which previously had been interpreted as taking some formal action such as ordination or gay marriage and not simply being perceived as friendly to gays.

BGCT President David Lowrie, pastor of First Baptist Church in El Paso, had been in conversations with Broadway Baptist leaders since questions about the church's stand on homosexual behavior became an issue.

"Over the past two years I have worked closely with the leadership of Broadway Baptist Church seeking to find a way for us to continue to work together without compromising our historic values and commitments. The conversations were open, frank, and respectful but unfortunately I believe our differences necessitated their decision to step away from our partnership," Lowrie said.

"I respect their right and freedom to follow their understanding of God's will for their lives. I also believe the BGCT and its leadership were right to stand firm on our understanding of God's will for our lives and ministries. In these complex, challenging days I pray our Baptist family will rally together around the gospel of Jesus Christ as our only hope of meaningful change in our society."

In its letter to the BGCT, Beasley said one of Broadway's commitments is "welcoming all persons into our church, including the outcast, those on the margins of society, and those who have not found that welcome in many other places, including, unfortunately, many churches."

As a result, Beasley said, Broadway Baptist Church has "become a vital and diverse community of faith, coming from many different backgrounds and representing many different perspectives, but united in the love and grace of Jesus Christ."

"We take this step with some regret but also with profound hope for God's best future for us all and God's work in us," the letter concluded. "The BGCT will always be a part of our history, and we will be proud of that historic relationship and of the contributions Broadway has made to it over the years. We wish the best for you as we all seek to be the presence of Christ in our own unique and particular ways."

In May the BGCT Executive Board voted 63-4 to refuse funds from Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas and asked the church to stop identifying itself as affiliated with the BGCT after the congregation updated its website announcing its openness to homosexuals.

New website language approved by deacons in February described Royal Lane as "an inclusive, multi-generational congregation" and a "vibrant mosaic of varied racial identities, ethnicities, sexual orientations and denominational backgrounds." The website further identified Royal Lane as "an ecumenical Baptist congregation affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Convention of Texas."

Citing precedent of similar action against University Baptist Church in Austin in 1998, the BGCT Executive Board declared Royal Lane "outside the BGCT understanding of biblical and historic views on sexual ethics."

Beasley said the Royal Lane case "wasn't really discussed" in Broadway's

decision. "We really felt like this is the best thing for us," he said. "This helps us keep our focus on our mission and not these denominational things."

"These are good days at Broadway," Beasley said. "Our finances are strong — our giving is ahead of expenses and well ahead of last year; the spirit of the congregation is positive and healthy; our worship attendance is on the rise; new families and individuals are finding their place at Broadway. We continue to serve those in need in a multitude of ways. We are focused on our mission in the present and beginning to look to the future, which is exciting."

Reported by Bob Allen from Associated Baptist Press, with additional reporting by Baptist Standard Managing Editor Ken Camp