

Baptists in Texas work together to support global theological education

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Providing theological education to pastors around the world is one way churches from both Baptist conventions in Texas work together.

Participants in a pastors mission consortium of [Global Leadership Development](#)—an initiative of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary—appealed to attendees of a steering committee meeting Aug. 19 to consider partnering with a seminary in one of numerous locations around the world to train leaders for Christian ministry.

Among participants in the initiative are churches uniquely or dually aligned with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and/or the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.



David Mahfouz, pastor of First Baptist Church in Warren, and host of the pastors mission consortium steering committee meeting (Photo Eric Black).

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Global Leadership Development counted 325 partner churches known as “Champion Churches.” By Aug. 19, the number of Champion Churches had increased to 354, David Mahfouz, pastor of First Baptist Church in Warren and host of the Pastors Mission Consortium meeting, reported by email.

Not included in that number are member churches of various partnering Baptist associations, such as Golden Triangle Network in Beaumont, he added.

Ira Antoine, director of bivocational ministry for Texas Baptists and bivocational pastor of Minnehulla Baptist Church in Goliad, described how his congregation became a Champion Church.

During initial visits to Tanzania in March and August 2019, Antoine and others saw the need for pastors and ministry leaders there to receive training that in turn would enable them to train more leaders in their country.

The visiting team determined the best way to provide the training needed in Tanzania is to support churches planted by pastors who complete at least a certificate of ministry at the [Tanzania Baptist Theological Seminary](#).

Minnehulla Baptist Church is partnering with Pastor Benson Moses Mwaikaju for one year, providing 50 percent of the resources he needs. The Baptist Convention of Tanzania is providing the remaining 50 percent. One of those resources is a bicycle. In appreciation, Mwaikaju named his bicycle “Texas and Tanzania Church Plant.”

Texas churches can support a church plant for \$50 a month, Antoine said, encouraging attendees to connect with the Texas Baptist [Missionary Adoption Program](#).

Steve Branson, pastor of Village Parkway Baptist Church in San Antonio—uniquely aligned with the SBTC—told attendees it took four trips to a restricted country to be able to see what really was needed there. Means of communication is a persistent need, leading Village Parkway to purchase data so Baptist leaders can communicate with one another across the country.

“Every school saw some kind of growth despite the [COVID] lockdown,” Peter Vavrosky, a graduate of Southwestern Seminary and president and director of Trinity Academic, noted. Schools referenced are the 90 seminaries partnering with Global Leadership Development. He attributed at least some of the growth to online resources available to seminaries through a theological education portal provided by Trinity Academic.

In many locations, student enrollment outpaces seminaries’ ability to provide the infrastructure for online learning, Vavrosky explained. Trinity Academic helps these seminaries keep their technology costs low, in part by housing necessary infrastructure—including servers and networks—in the United States, he said.

The theological portal includes a master library through the Alexandria Project, encrypted storage similar to Dropbox, and secure audio and video conferencing. It also facilitates collaboration between Champion Churches and the schools with which they partner.

Lake Arlington Baptist Church—dually aligned with the BGCT and SBTC—began providing financial support for portals in Spain and the Middle East in 2019 and continues to partner with seminaries in both locations, Pastor Eric Herrstrom communicated by email.

“A church plants churches,” and if churches aren’t doing that, then “they’re not functionally a church,” Herrstrom said during the meeting. In one country, seminary students cannot graduate until they have planted two churches, he added.

“Missions is theological education, and theological education is missions,” Mahfouz said.

Seminaries and theological education were “abandoned” when the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention changed its approach to missions in 1997 in an effort to “eliminate bureaucracy,”

Mahfouz asserted.

Global Leadership Development counts 90 related seminaries in all parts of the globe, with an estimated combined enrollment of more than 27,000 students.



Daniel Sanchez, professor emeritus and ambassador of the World Missions Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Photo Eric Black).

The Global Hispanic Baptist Consortium for Theological Education—the first consortium of Baptist theological schools—formed in 2013 and now includes 35 seminaries from Latin America and Spain.

Seminaries in other regions quickly saw the growth among participants of the consortium and began conversations to form their own consortiums, Daniel Sanchez, distinguished professor emeritus of missions and ambassador of the World Missions Center at Southwestern Seminary, noted.

Possible new consortiums include Portuguese language, Asian Baptist and European Baptist. An African Baptist Theological Network has formed, though it currently does not relate directly to Global Leadership Development.

Global Leadership Development looks for mission-minded churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and committed to the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to become Champion Churches.

Champion Churches commit to partner with a seminary for five years.

Planning, budgeting, vision trips and discerning the strategic need of a particular seminary occupy the first year of the partnership. Partnerships involve tailored, rather than standardized, agreements.

“For us, this is an extension of our current partnership in Belize, where we have worked to train pastors,” Jim Turnbo, executive director of Golden Triangle Baptist Network, wrote in an email. “In training the Kekchi pastors of Belize, we work with an instructor from the Kekchi seminary in Guatemala. His death from COVID-19 last year impressed on us the need to continually raise up indigenous leaders who train others,” he added.

“The Global Leadership Development partnership allows us an opportunity to serve with greater missional impact. When we send a team and conduct Vacation Bible School, we share the gospel for a week. But when we help solidify the training of indigenous pastors and ministry leaders through the seminaries, we assure the gospel among a people for perpetuity.”