

BGCT Executive Board approves sexual abuse task force

May 23, 2023

The Baptist General Convention of Texas voted to create a task force to study and recommend responses to sexual abuse issues in Texas Baptist churches.

During a May 23 meeting conducted via Zoom, the board voted 65-1 to approve a recommendation to create the task force to “strengthen and clarify” the BGCT response to sexual abuse in churches.

The nine-member task force will include three Executive Board members, three Texas Baptist pastors who are not on the board and three licensed counselors who are not on the board. The task force also will have access to legal counsel.

Associate Executive Director Craig Christina and BGCT Executive Board Chair Bobby Contreras will appoint members of the task force, which will function until Dec. 31, 2024, unless extended by the board.

“Addressing sexual abuse within the church requires a multifaceted approach,” the background section of the printed recommendation provided to BGCT Executive Board members stated.

“Texas Baptists have been a leader in advocating for prevention in this area through trainings, background checks, policies and procedures, and overall awareness. We remain committed to this important aspect of this issue.”

The BGCT provides access to free sexual abuse awareness training in partnership with [MinistrySafe](#) to provide information specifically about child sexual abuse prevention.

In September 2021, the BGCT Executive Board approved a policy declaring any registered sex offender “permanently disqualified” from church leadership. The board approved a policy that any congregation allowing registered sex offenders in church leadership roles “may be considered out of harmonious cooperation” with the convention.

“On the issue of care, for years we have provided recommendations and funding to those dealing with clergy sexual abuse,” the document continued, adding the BGCT remains “committed to meeting this need.”

[Texas Baptist Counseling Services](#) offers help in locating counseling resources.

Questions for task force to examine

However, the document presented to the board stated, a task force can help the BGCT explore additional questions such as:

- “How can we assist churches that become aware of an accusation, recent or decades old, of this nature?”
- “What should BGCT guidelines be for relating to churches and/or volunteers mentioned in such allegations, in their dealings with the BGCT?”
- “At what level of evidence/proof is action required and/or clearance afforded?”
- “If law enforcement declines to pursue an accusation, what steps should a church and/or [the] BGCT take or not take?”

Plans for new BSM on the Baylor

Campus

During the May 23 virtual meeting, the Executive Board also ratified a memorandum of understanding between the BGCT and Baylor University to build a new Baptist Student Ministry center on the Baylor campus.

Baylor University will donate a parcel of land for the building site. The BGCT will secure funds to design, build and maintain the building, at an estimated \$6 million cost. When Texas Baptists have raised \$3 million in receipts and pledges, the university will finalize the deed to the property.

The Executive Board agreed to allocate \$500,000 from available investment and undesignated endowment earnings to the Baylor BSM building project.

Relationship agreements affirmed

The board also affirmed new relationship agreements with Hendrick Medical Center and the *Baptist Standard*. The agreements will require approval by messengers to the BGCT annual meeting during Texas Baptists' Family Gathering in McAllen.

The relationship agreement with Hendrick Medical Center calls for the BGCT to elect no more than 20 percent of the medical center's board of directors. Currently, messengers to the BGCT annual meeting elect 75 percent of the board. The agreement calls for all board members to be members of BGCT-supporting churches.

The relationship agreement with the *Baptist Standard* states the BGCT and the *Baptist Standard* remain "autonomous and independent organizations." It stipulates the news organization will "maintain its longstanding partnership with the BGCT for the purpose of informing and resourcing the churches and institutions of the BGCT and the broader Christian community."

Under the relationship agreement, the BGCT will continue to elect a simple majority of the *Baptist Standard*'s board of directors, and the agreement stipulates all directors on the board will be "members in good standing" of Baptist churches.

Question raised about gun violence

Following a report from the Christian Life Commission, Paul Kim, pastor of Forest Community Church in Dallas and Executive Board member, noted the mass shooting at an outlet mall in Allen claimed the lives of three members of the Cho family, who were part of New Song Church in Carrollton.



Pastor Paul Kim raises a question during the BGCT Executive Board meeting, held via Zoom. (Screen capture image)

In light of the attack, Kim said, members of his congregation and some other Asian American churches want to know, "Can we as Texas Baptists make a statement about gun violence?"

He specifically asked if the CLC is dealing with the issue of gun violence as part of its commitment to pro-life causes.

CLC Director Katie Frugé said "internal conversations" are ongoing about

how to address the issue. They include soliciting feedback from Texas Baptists who serve on the governing commission, she noted.

John Litzler, director of public policy, pointed out one gun control measure—raising the age for purchasing an assault rifle from 18 to 21—was approved by a committee in the Texas House, but it never advanced to the full House of Representatives. The Texas Senate showed no desire to consider the measure.

In his report to the board, Ward Hayes, BGCT chief financial officer and treasurer, said Texas Baptists' Cooperative Program receipts through the end of the first quarter totaled about \$7.47 million, compared to \$7.7 million during the same period in 2022.

In other business, the board:

- Held part of its meeting in executive session. The chair did not indicate during the open portion of the meeting anything regarding the nature of what was to be discussed in executive session, which typically is reserved for legal matters or personnel issues.
- Approved a recommendation from the Committee on Nominations for Boards of Affiliated Ministries to elect Marilyn Elliott from First Baptist Church in San Antonio to fill a vacancy on the Baptist Health Foundation of San Antonio board of trustees.
- Adopted a personnel policy change recommended by the administration support committee to add Juneteenth as a paid holiday for BGCT Executive Board employees.
- Affirmed policy changes recommended by the administration support committee regarding extended ministry leave and medical leave of absence for personnel, as well as updated language to the policy guidelines for the Mary Hill Davis Ethnic/Minority Scholarship program.