

# **BGCT Executive Board recommends reduced budget for 2009**

September 30, 2008

DALLAS—Messengers to the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in November will consider a budget about 8 percent less than the one approved at the previous annual meeting and down slightly from the current adjusted budget.

At its Sept. 30 meeting, the BGCT Executive Board approved a \$45,755,295 proposed budget for 2009. Of the total, Texas Baptist Cooperative Program giving would need to provide more than \$40.8 million, with the balance expected from investment earnings and other revenue sources.

One year ago, the board recommended and messengers to the annual meeting approved a \$50.1 million budget for 2008.

But after the first quarter of this year, the board learned the convention faced a serious budget shortfall. Staff implemented cutbacks, and the budget was adjusted to \$46,186,665.

Jill Larsen, treasurer and chief financial officer, explained the proposed budget is based on “flat revenue.” The proposed budget includes cost-of-living salary increases of up to 3 percent for BGCT Executive Board staff.

The board also approved a recommendation from its Administration Support Committee that the adopted budget continue to be divided 79 percent for the BGCT and 21 percent to worldwide causes as directed by churches.

For churches that select the BGCT worldwide initiatives giving option, that area will include two additional global missions programs—intercultural international missions and Texas Baptist Men international ministries—as well as continuing support for River Ministry and Mexico missions, WorldconneX, Texas Partnerships and the Baptist World Alliance.

They also will be expanded to include four Texas Baptist missions initiatives—the Texas Fellowship of Cowboy Churches, Baptist University of the Americas, the Hispanic Education Task Force and Texas Hope 2010.

Total projected revenue for BGCT worldwide initiatives is \$1.6 million.

The board also recommended a constitutional change that would provide the potential for increased representation at the annual meeting by small churches that give generously to the BGCT.

Currently, the constitution says each church is entitled to two messengers for up to 100 members, plus two additional messengers for the first \$250 given to the BGCT budget and one additional messenger for each additional 100 members and each \$1,000 given, up to a maximum 25 messengers.

The recommended change would state that if a church's giving surpasses its membership, it would be entitled to one additional messenger for each \$2,000 given, up to six additional messengers. The maximum number of messengers per church would remain at 25.

The constitutional amendment would require approval by messengers at two consecutive BGCT annual meetings.

Acting on recommendations from its Institutional Relations Committee, the board approved for consideration at the annual meeting revised special agreements between the BGCT and two related institutions—Buckner International and Hillcrest Health System/Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center.

The first agreement would change the percentage of Buckner trustees directly elected by the BGCT from 33 percent to 25 percent. It also stipulates that 75 percent of the trustees elected by Buckner be Baptists, as opposed to the current requirement that the board be 100 percent Baptist.

The agreement stipulates all trustees would be Christians who are “willingly supportive of the Baptist principles upon which (Buckner) was founded.”

It also states, “In all its operations and services, Buckner holds to the policies, principles and doctrines of the Baptist faith.”

Buckner President Ken Hall explained Buckner has become “a national ministry with a global outreach.” He noted in some areas where Buckner works, churches that may not bear the Baptist name adhere to historic Baptist principles and beliefs.

John Ogletree, an Executive Board director from Houston, spoke in favor of the proposal, considering it an opportunity for the BGCT to “affirm kingdom work that goes beyond the denomination.”

The other special agreement with Hillcrest provides for BGCT representation on a newly configured governing board created by the memorandum of understanding between Hillcrest and Scott & White Hospital in Temple.

Under terms of the proposal, Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center will be managed by a board of trustees, with half the board elected by Scott & White and half by Hillcrest Health System. The BGCT will directly elect 25 percent of the Hillcrest Health System board, and a majority of the board members will belong to BGCT-affiliated churches.

Terms of the agreement specify Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center and Hillcrest Health System will be operated “within the Christian-oriented

aims and ideals of Baptists, including those contained within the Baptist Faith & Message statement of 1963.”

In other business, the Executive Board elected Steve Vernon, past president of the BGCT and pastor of First Baptist Church in Levelland, as associate executive director/missions coordinator.

Vernon, who served terms as second vice president and first vice president before his time as the convention’s top elected officer, has been pastor in Levelland since 1991.

Before that, he was pastor of First Baptist Church in Panhandle from 1983 to 1991. He also previously was pastor of First Baptist Church in Kress and First Baptist Church in Ames, Okla. Vernon, a native of Happy, served on the staff at Tower Baptist Church in White Settlement, Spring Baptist Church in Waco and First Baptist Church in Happy.

He earned a bachelor’s degree from Baylor University and master’s and doctoral degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He and his wife, Donna, have three children and two grandchildren.

The Executive Board also re-elected John Petty of Kerrville as chair and elected Debbie Ferrier of Houston as vice chair.