

BGCT hears task force report, elects officers

November 14, 2022

WACO—Messengers to the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting heard a report from a task force created to enhance Gen Z and Millennial engagement in Texas Baptist life.

During the first business session of the Nov.13-15 meeting, messengers also elected as officers three pastors of churches in McAllen, Garland and Burleson, and they approved a \$35.5 million Texas budget for 2023.

Chris McLain, pastor of First Baptist Church in Bandera, presented the report from the Gen Z/Millennial Task Force, created in a response to a motion he made at the 2021 BGCT annual meeting in Galveston.

“The task force conversations, both online and in person, have uncovered opportunities to enhance our connections to emerging adults and explored ways to intentionally incorporate emerging adults into the story God is writing through Texas Baptists,” McLain said.

He pointed to four themes that grew out of the task force discussions:

- **Invite emerging adults to the table.**

In addition to providing venues and occasions where emerging adults can voice their thoughts, the task force also called on the BGCT to demonstrate “intentionality in including emerging adults in the work of our committees, board and leadership teams.”

“In the same line of thought, we want to make sure the goal of developing our emerging adults is at the forefront of all our leadership initiatives,”

McLain continued, reading from the task force report.

“Providing emerging adults opportunities to express their passions, giftedness, struggles and situations by engaging them with seasoned leaders will benefit Texas Baptists by passing along generational wisdom and institutional knowledge. These intentional engagements will strengthen emerging adults in their ministries and safeguard the future of Texas Baptists.”

▪ **Share the story.**

Texas Baptists need to be in the communications spaces emerging adults occupy, such as short-form online videos. “We aspire to share our story in compelling ways that differentiate our message through authenticity, honesty and sympathy,” McLain said.

The task force also challenged Texas Baptists not only to provide places for dialogue with emerging adults at events such as the BGCT annual meeting, but also “start conversations with emerging adults that live on after the meeting is over.”

“We seek means and methods to turn our times of information sharing into lasting conversations that keep us connected,” McLain said.

▪ **Organizational innovation.**

The BGCT “is like an aircraft carrier in that it takes a long time to turn, but we must also be nimble to follow the Spirit’s leading. In a changing world, and with the challenge of growing generational differences, we need to reflect upon the structures, purposes and processes of our institutional forms to ensure we are headed where God is leading us,” McLain said, quoting the task force report.

The task force particularly pointed out the need to provide resources to emerging adults serving as leaders of small churches “with the hope of making a meaningful impact in the beginning stages of their ministries that will pay lifelong dividends for our state.”

▪ **Spiritual growth.**

Recognize emerging adults are skilled at navigating difficult cultural issues.

“They can help us avoid the rhetoric of condemnation while maintaining strong biblical convictions,” McLain said. “As our state grows and changes, engaging with and resourcing emerging adults to follow their unique callings will both revitalize established congregations and plant the next generation of Texas Baptists churches.”

The task force also encouraged Texas Baptist churches to become extended family to emerging adults, offering them “not just an invitation to church but to Sunday dinner.”

Ministerial residency program

The Gen Z/ Millennial Task Force recommended Texas Baptists create another task force to study the viability of a BGCT ministerial residency program to help emerging adults grow as they work alongside “seasoned pastors in both rural and urban settings.”

Scotty Swingler, associate pastor of students at Sugar Land Baptist Church near Houston, introduced a motion on behalf of the task force calling on the chair of the BGCT Executive Board to “appoint a task force to explore the creation of a residency program whereby young ministers are mentored and trained by established ministers.”

“The task force will have a budget of \$10,000 to cover its expenses,” Swingler continued. “The task force will present their recommendations in a timely manner to the new executive director, Executive Board and the messengers of the convention no later than the 2024 annual meeting in Waco.”

The motion will be discussed and voted on during the second business session on Tuesday, Nov. 15.

McLain also reported other recommendations from the Gen Z/Millennial Task Force:

- Hold listening sessions around the state to hear from emerging adults.
- Supplement the work of Texas Baptists’ communications department, providing platforms for emerging adults to share their stories.
- Keep track of the number of emerging adults at this year’s annual meeting and aim to double that number at the next meeting.
- Launch a monthlong, statewide initiative to encourage and equip churches to invite emerging adults to engage in congregational family life.

Officers elected, budget approved



Texas Baptists elected as president Julio Guarneri (center), lead pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen. Messengers also elected as first vice president Nebiye Kelile (right), pastor of both Pathway Church and Orchard Hills Baptist Church in Garland, and as second vice president Ronny Marriott (left), pastor of First Baptist Church in Burleson. (BGCT Photo)

In other business, Texas Baptists elected as president Julio Guarneri, lead pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen. Guarneri has served this past year as first vice president. Messengers also elected as first vice president Nebiye Kelile, pastor of both Pathway Church and Orchard Hills Baptist Church in Garland, and as second vice president Ronny Marriott, pastor of First Baptist Church in Burleson.

Messengers approved a \$35,459,500 total Texas budget for 2023, a 2.5 percent increase over the 2022 budget, as recommended by the BGCT Executive Board. It projects a \$33.9 million net Texas budget—based on Cooperative Program giving and investment income—for 2023. It depends on \$27.25 million in Texas Cooperative Program receipts from churches.

The 2023 budget anticipates about \$6.65 million in investment income, up from \$5.4 million anticipated for 2022. It also projects about \$1.77 million in additional revenue from conference and booth fees, product sales and other sources.

Undesignated receipts from affiliated churches will continue to be divided 79 percent for the BGCT and 21 percent for worldwide causes.

An anticipated \$1 million in worldwide missions initiatives and partnerships will be allocated in the same manner as the previous year: \$340,000 for missions mobilization, \$200,000 for River Ministry and Mexico missions, \$100,000 for Texas Partnerships, \$55,000 for the Baptist World Alliance, \$5,000 for the North American Baptist Fellowship, \$50,000 for intercultural international initiatives, \$200,000 for Go Now Missions, \$20,000 for the Hispanic Education Task Force and \$30,000 for chaplaincy.

Messengers also approved a special relationship agreement with Denison Ministries, cofounded by Jim Denison, former pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas. Denison will be designated as theologian-in-residence for Texas Baptists. Texas Baptists and Denison Ministries will work cooperatively on ministry projects such as training events and conferences.

Editor's Note: After the article originally was posted, the section on the Ministerial Residency Program was edited to reflect more clearly the distinctions between the recommendation as it appeared in the task force report and the motion as it was presented to the annual meeting.