

BGCT leader underscores opposition to gay marriage, transgenderism

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DALLAS—Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director David Hardage reiterated Texas Baptists' official continued opposition to same-sex marriage and transgenderism.

In an otherwise routine BGCT Executive Board meeting, Hardage used his report to underscore previously adopted actions by the convention and the board related to lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender issues.

History of opposition to homosexual behavior

In 1982, messengers to the BGCT annual meeting approved the statement: "The homosexual lifestyle is not normal or acceptable in God's sight and is indeed called sin." Fourteen years later, the convention adopted a report stating the Bible teaches "the ideal for sexual behavior is the marital union between husband and wife and that all other sexual relations—whether premarital, extramarital or homosexual—are contrary to God's purposes and thus sinful."

In a 1998 recommendation to the BGCT Executive Board, the administrative committee stated: "We commend those churches who seek to minister to those persons who engage in homosexual behavior. We cannot, however, approve of churches endorsing homosexual practice as biblically legitimate."

The board at that time approved the committee's recommendation, refusing to accept donations from—and thereby essentially expelling from

convention affiliation—University Baptist Church in Austin after the congregation ordained a gay deacon.

‘We are not going to go there as a convention’

Even so, the BGCT Executive Board offices continue to receive calls asking about Texas Baptists’ stand on gay marriage, Hardage said. The BGCT’s position has been “misrepresented,” and Texas Baptists have been “falsely accused” of supporting gay rights, he added.

“We are a loving people. I have friends—I have people I love—who are gay. I care about them,” Hardage said. “But as loving as I am about that and as welcoming as we are, we are not people who affirm gay marriage. That’s not who we are. We are not going to go there as a convention. ...

“We love people all day long. I don’t know a pastor who doesn’t welcome people into their church. But we are a people who believe biblical marriage is one man and one woman, ‘til death do us part.”

Gender identity defined by biology

Regarding the high-profile issue of transgender individuals, Hardage pointed to a resolution the BGCT Executive Board adopted one year ago, asserting “in the Bible, gender is based on biological attributes and is seen as a gift from God and immutable.”

The board adopted the resolution at the request of some Texas Baptist university presidents who wanted to seek a Title IX exemption from the U.S. Department of Education regarding accommodations for transgender students. East Texas Baptist University, Hardin-Simmons University, Howard Payne University, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and Wayland Baptist University subsequently received [exemptions](#).

“Our statement basically was that we are biologically driven people and not

psychologically driven people when it comes to that issue,” Hardage said. “Even though that’s where we stand, and that’s what we believe, I never want to be offensive to anybody. I don’t want to drive away people I’d like to see come to Christ. I think that’s the heart of Texas Baptists.”

Dollars and cents

In her report to the executive board, BGCT Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer Jill Larsen noted church contributions to the BGCT Cooperative Program—Texas Baptists’ unified giving plan—totaled about \$7.9 million through the first quarter—91 percent of budget. However, she noted, expenses did not exceed receipts.

Larsen attributed much of the shortfall to problems generated when BGCT offices moved.

After the BGCT Executive Board staff moved from 333 N. Washington, east of downtown Dallas, to 7557 Rambler Rd. in North Dallas, administration eventually closed a post office box near the old location and completed paperwork to have all mail forwarded to the new address.

However, the BGCT treasurer’s office did not receive checks from about 560 churches that typically contribute monthly. Staff members are in the process of contacting those churches individually, Larsen reported.

In other business, the board:

- Revised its business and financial plan. The revisions bring the policy into alignment with common current business practices and correct some technical issues.
- Revised its investment policy. The revised policy provides more specifically defined roles and responsibilities and clarifies various matters for consideration with regard to funds invested by the BGCT.

The policy statement on social responsibility prohibits investment in companies that manufacture or market alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, gambling or pornography. It further clarifies, "Where the BGCT invests in mutual funds, this criteria will be assumed to be met if none of the prohibited investments occur in the top 10 holdings of the fund."

- Revised its policy on information technology and services usage, clarifying some matters and eliminating outdated language regarding specific technology.