

Board distances BGCT from gay-affirming Dallas church

May 25, 2010

DALLAS—The Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board voted May 25 to refuse any financial contributions from a North Dallas church that has ordained as deacons practicing homosexuals, and the board asked the church to stop identifying itself as affiliated with the BGCT.

The 63-4 vote by the BGCT Executive Board regarding [Royal Lane Baptist Church](#) came one day after [Dallas Baptist Association's](#) board voted to declare the church out of fellowship with the association.

Executive Board motion introduced

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**BGCT Executive Board session
Tuesday. Discussion of Royal
Lane Baptist Church starts at
6:00 minutes in.**

The BGCT board approved a motion from its executive committee acknowledging the autonomy of Royal Lane Baptist Church but also stating the BGCT “expresses its standards for churches identifying with the BGCT.”

“In ordaining practicing homosexuals as deacons, the actions of Royal Lane place the church outside the BGCT understanding of biblical and historic views on sexual ethics,” the motion said.

“Therefore, the executive committee recommends that the BGCT not accept any funds from Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas. We request that Royal Lane Baptist Church discontinue the publication of any materials that indicate that they affiliate with the BGCT. Funds received from Royal Lane Baptist Church since Jan. 1, 2010, will be returned to the church. This will also result in the disqualification for service of Royal Lane Baptist Church members on the BGCT staff and membership on boards and committees elected by the BGCT.”

Royal Lane deacon responds

Two BGCT employees are members of Royal Lane Baptist Church, and the board was told they plan to move their membership to another church. Doug Washington, a director of the BGCT Executive Board and deacon at Royal Lane, spoke against the motion.

“We at Royal Lane continue to be the same church I came to know and love,” he said. “We do, in fact, have some gay and lesbian members. If you stop and look, some of your churches do, too.”

Royal Lane has a gay deacon and a lesbian deacon, he added, pointing to them as gifted and committed individuals. Royal Lane does not ask if its members with homosexual orientation are practicing homosexuals any more than it asks its single members if they are celibate, he noted.

“We just say: ‘Come as you are. We will lead by example,’” Washington said.

Christian churches constitute the only society on earth where people are admitted into membership based on their acknowledged unworthiness, he noted.

Gospel includes repentance, BGCT president stresses

BGCT President David Lowrie agreed BGCT Executive Director Randel churches should be open to all people, Everett speaks about the resolution recognizing all people who come to Christ must acknowledge their sin. Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas. However, he added, the gospel also includes a call to repentance.

“To repent means acknowledging the brokenness that is in all of us and acknowledging that change is possible,” he said.

Churches have a responsibility to preach and model the whole gospel—accepting sinners just as they are, but also telling them they do not have to remain as they always have been, he insisted.

Churches also must exercise discernment in how they select leaders, he added. Quoting the late Cecil Sherman, former pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth and founding coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Lowrie said, “We cannot compromise in the area of leadership.”

Church declares its inclusiveness

The board’s action followed the precedent set in 1998 when the BGCT Executive Board learned University Baptist Church in Austin ordained a gay deacon and noted that action on its website.

On Feb. 14, Royal Lane Baptist Church’s deacons [voted to approve new wording](#) for the church’s website, emphasizing its inclusive stance.

“Royal Lane Baptist Church is an inclusive, multi-generational congregation joined in Christian community. We are a vibrant mosaic of varied racial identities, ethnicities, sexual orientations and denominational backgrounds,” the church’s website stated.

The website also identified the church as “an ecumenical Baptist

congregation affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.”

A March 6 article in the *Dallas Morning News* described the church as “coming out of the closet” in its ministry to homosexuals.

BGCT leaders respond

After the article appeared, BGCT Executive Director Randel Everett [requested a meeting](#) with leaders of the church. Joining Everett and other BGCT Executive Board senior staff were Lowrie, Executive Board Chair Debbie Ferrier, Executive Board Vice Chair Van Christian, Dallas Baptist Association Executive Director Bob Dean, Royal Lane Pastor David Matthews and Washington.

After the meeting, Everett instructed the BGCT treasurer’s office to escrow all funds contributed from Royal Lane to the BGCT since Jan. 1 and asked the church to remove references to the BGCT from its website until the church clarified its position on homosexual behavior and the Executive Board could respond.

Church approves letter

On April 21, at a quarterly church conference, Royal Lane Baptist Church adopted a letter from its deacon board to Everett expressing its “sincere sense of loss” that the church faced the possibility of “discontinuing a long history of cooperation in Christian ministry” with the BGCT.

“Through the years, decisions have been made by the BGCT that would not have been the first choice” of Royal Lane, the letter said. “However, the strength of our relationship has been in what we can accomplish for the kingdom of God in partnership.

“Royal Lane is the same church that it has been since its founding in 1952.

We were on the front lines of ordaining women as deacons in the 1970s, the first woman served as deacon chair in the 1980s, and a member, who is homosexual, was ordained to the deacon board at least 15 years ago.”

The letter pointed out many of Royal Lane’s lay leaders grew up in the church.

“All who come professing Christ as Lord and Savior are welcomed as members who are equally loved and valued,” the letter said. “Should we now tell them that what they have learned about the radical grace of God is not really true? Should we suggest that such a truth be kept quiet?”

Painful, not difficult, executive director says

Doug Washington, a director of the BGCT Executive Board and deacon at Royal Lane, spoke against the motion.

On the eve of the BGCT Executive Board meeting, members of the board’s executive committee met with deacons from Royal Lane Baptist Church to clarify further the positions of both the church and the BGCT.

“The situation has been painful but not difficult for me,” Everett told the board.

The matter became painful because he recognized any action by the BGCT would be misunderstood by some and misinterpreted by others, he said.

It also was painful because Royal Lane had a long history of partnership with the state convention and because he saw Washington as a valued board member and trusted friend, he added.

However, Everett said, he did not see the decision as difficult because the church had demonstrated by its actions in ordaining gay and lesbian deacons that its convictions are inconsistent with positions consistently

expressed by Texas Baptists.

The BGCT has approved resolutions at annual meetings in 1982, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2005 and 2009 describing homosexual behavior as sinful, outside God's perfect will and contrary to the biblical norm for families.

He noted particularly a 2009 resolution affirming "the biblical sexual ethic of fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, and ... the biblical image of marriage as the union before God between a man and a woman."

Association declares church 'out of fellowship'

In a letter to Royal Lane from Dallas Baptist Association, Dean likewise wrote, "The Bible has a number of references that speak clearly to the issue that homosexual behavior is sin and, therefore, an unbiblical lifestyle."

The association "recognizes and respects the autonomy of each church in our association," Dean's letter said. "The association is also autonomous and free to determine if churches are in doctrinal harmony."

A resolution from the credentials committee and administrative committee of the association and approved by its executive board concluded Royal Lane had "affirmed a position regarding homosexual behavior that is not in harmony with the historic faith and practices of Baptists substantially as set forth in the Holy Scriptures."

The resolution noted doctrinal conflict remained unresolved after conversations involving Royal Lane's leaders and the association's executive officers.

The resolution declared Royal Lane "out of fellowship" with the association and said messengers from the church would not be seated or recognized at the association's annual meeting.

Other business

The BGCT Executive Board also authorized \$12,000 a month to Baptist University of the Américas in San Antonio from July to December to help provide non-degree-level basic Bible institutes in South Texas, along the Rio Grande.

Of the \$72,000 total, \$51,400 would be made available from the proceeds of foreclosed property sold by the Baptist Church Loan Corporation, and the balance would be from the proceeds of trusts.

The board will consider continued funding of the institutes at a reduced rate in 2011 and 2012 after BUA submits a business plan.

In other business, the board:

- Recommended a change to the BGCT constitution that would change the percentage of convention-elected trustees on institutional boards from 75 percent to a simple majority. The change will require approval by messengers to two consecutive BGCT annual meetings.
- Approved a resolution recognizing the centennial of the Baylor University Louise Herrington School of Nursing.