

# Ezell to host BGCT information sessions in early 2025

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ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)—North American Mission Board president Kevin Ezell will host a series of information sessions in early 2025 to answer questions raised by Southern Baptist pastors whose churches are affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“Our desire is to connect with Southern Baptist pastors in the BGCT whose churches are most engaged and interested in partnering in national missions efforts,” Ezell said.

The sessions, hosted by Southern Baptist churches affiliated with the BGCT, tentatively are scheduled for Dallas-Fort Worth on Jan. 13, Houston on Jan. 14, Austin on Jan. 21 and San Antonio on Jan. 22, Ezell told the *Baptist Standard*. A West Texas session also is planned, but the date and location are not set yet.

Union Baptist Association confirmed sessions at two Houston-area locations on Jan. 14: 9:30 a.m. at First Baptist Church in Pasadena and 2 p.m. at Chinese Baptist Church.

“We are still finalizing the details,” Ezell stated. “We will share times and specific locations soon.”



North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell responds to a question from Texas pastor Dustin Slaton. (Photo by Van Payne / The Baptist Paper)

"I am grateful for what Texas Southern Baptist churches that are connected with the BGCT invest in missions through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Cooperative Program," he said.

"NAMB desires a continued partnership with these churches, and these gatherings will help us clearly communicate that and also to address questions pastors may have."

In response to questions from the *Baptist Standard* about who will participate in the information sessions and whether reporters would be allowed to attend, Ezell responded by email: "In order for pastors to feel complete freedom to share and discuss openly, there will only be associational leaders, pastors and staff of churches invited to attend."

"The meetings are intended for all Southern Baptist churches affiliated with the BGCT," as well as associational leaders, a further clarification stated.

"The pastors we have heard from are very supportive of NAMB but are confused about how NAMB can partner and not partner with Southern Baptist churches that are affiliated with the BGCT," Ezell wrote.

"I am thankful for the investment that many Southern Baptist churches connected with the BGCT make toward supporting our missionaries. I want to make sure they have access to accurate information about our relationship and the opportunities we have to partner," he continued.

## **Partnership 'could look very different'**

"NAMB's partnership with the BGCT might have some limitations, but how we partner with Southern Baptist churches that relate to the BGCT could look very different," Ezell said.

In response to a follow-up question about how the partnerships between BGCT churches and NAMB might take shape, Ezell stated: "We have said earlier that the purpose of our meetings with Southern Baptist pastors in the BGCT and with BGCT leadership is to work toward continued partnership. We're hopeful these ongoing discussions will bring us closer to that. NAMB also relates directly with many churches, so that would always be an option."

Beginning in 2010, NAMB started shifting more resources to regions outside the South where church-to-population ratios are much higher and lostness much greater.

In partnership with leaders of South state Baptist conventions, NAMB transitioned funding in the South to an annual \$300,000 grant to be used for church planting. The change resulted in several million additional dollars being channeled to needs outside the South in the ensuing years.

NAMB's doctrinal standard is the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, and

NAMB only provides financial support for church plants that affirm the same standard.

## Question raised at SBC annual meeting



Dustin Slaton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Round Rock, asks North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell to clear up the “murky” relationship between NAMB and Texas Baptists. (Photo by Pam Henderson / The Baptist Paper)

Dustin Slaton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Georgetown, [questioned the policy](#) during Ezell’s report to this year’s Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

“NAMB has gladly accepted my church’s financial investment in the North American Mission Board for decades without asking which version of the BFM we have in our documents or concern about which state convention we’re a part of,” Slaton said at the SBC annual meeting.

“So, can we now count on the North American Mission Board to reciprocate that investment by partnering with us to plant genuinely Southern Baptist churches in Texas and invest in us with the same resources, training, guidance, relationships and financial opportunities you would provide to a church who partners with our other wonderful state convention?”

Ezell explained NAMB can come alongside a BGCT-affiliated Southern Baptist church that wants to plant a church outside the state of Texas in states where conventions affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

“I would love for you to consider and for your state convention to adopt the Baptist Faith & Message 2000,” Ezell concluded in response to Slaton.

## **BGCT messengers reject affirmation of 2000 BFM**

While some BGCT-affiliated churches affirm the 2000 statement, the BGCT explicitly affirms the 1963 version of the Baptist Faith & Message. At the 2024 BGCT annual meeting, messengers decisively defeated a motion to affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.



Long lines quickly formed at each microphone on the floor of the convention center hall as pastors

and other messengers prepared to present arguments for and against the motion calling on the BGCT to affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message. (Photo/ Ken Camp)

Ezell told the *Baptist Standard* the information meetings were planned after the vote at the BGCT annual meeting.

“I heard from several Southern Baptist pastors and directors of missions who are committed to NAMB and also connected to the BGCT,” he stated. “Their advice was that the best option for communicating accurate information was to do it in person.”

When the *Baptist Standard* asked for a response from BGCT Executive Director Julio Guarneri, he expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage in ongoing dialogue with NAMB leaders.

Guarneri said Ezell accepted his invitation “to another in-person meeting here at our Texas Baptists offices early in the new year to continue the conversation.”

He also noted his appreciation for Ezell’s desire to connect directly with Texas Baptist pastors to clarify options available to them.

“As dates and locations are confirmed, we will gladly provide whatever support is needed,” Guarneri stated. “Time spent in Texas with Texas Baptist churches is an investment I’m sure he won’t regret.

“We share a Great Commandment/Great Commission task that is bigger than any one of us can achieve alone. Cooperation is essential.”

Both Guarneri and Ezell emphasized their shared desire to find a way for Texas Baptist churches that want to partner with NAMB in church planting

to do so.

"Since June I have had several conversations with pastors who lead Southern Baptist churches affiliated with BGCT. In August I met with pastors and BGCT leadership with the goal of working toward ways we can partner most effectively," Ezell said.

"The ministry work we do together at the Send Relief Ministry Center in Laredo is a great example of how we partner well."

## **Pastors respond to ongoing developments**

Several pastors who were part of the August meeting offered their thoughts on recent developments regarding NAMB and the BGCT.



Jeff Williams, pastor of First Baptist Church in Denton, made a motion "that the Baptist General Convention of Texas affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message."

(Photo / Calli Keener)

Jeff Williams, pastor of First Baptist Church in Denton, introduced the

motion at Texas Baptists' annual meeting in Waco to affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

"The reason I made the motion at the meeting was to get NAMB leadership and BGCT leadership talking about the relationship between the two entities," Williams told the *Baptist Standard*. "I think that was accomplished."

When asked whether messengers voting to reject the motion affected his church's relationship to the BGCT, he said, "My church is as committed as we have always been to the BGCT and the Southern Baptist Convention."

Slaton, who questioned Ezell at the SBC annual meeting, said he raised the query to "bring clarity" to the issue of how BGCT churches can partner with NAMB in church planting.

"In the previous meeting we had with Dr. Ezell back in August, he clarified that all of the planting resources that are available to other states are also available to BGCT and its churches. The only difference between BGCT and a convention that is a Send Network convention, (like the SBTC) is how funding happens," Slaton wrote in an email.

"In that case, the NAMB funding comes through a grant to the BGCT, and the BGCT distributes it. This is similar to how NAMB has partnered with many other southern states for many years, and is not unique to the BGCT."

Slaton noted his church's relationship with the BGCT did not change after messengers turned down the motion to affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

"However, I do not think a 'yes' outcome of the vote would have affected our relationship with the BGCT either," he added.

Dan Newburg, pastor of First Baptist Church in Devine, offered a

somewhat different perspective.

"The allegiance and loyalty of FBC Devine is to Jesus Christ. With this said, we have found the BGCT to be an exceptional kingdom partner and the annual meeting did not change this," he stated.

"All of the messengers we sent to Waco stood and were counted among those who were in opposition to the motion for the BGCT to affirm the BF&M 2000. We affirm the BF&M 1963, like the BGCT."

Events in recent months have, however, caused his church to question whether it can continue to partner with NAMB.

"In no way does our congregation give with an expectation of return, but we are a growing congregation who recognizes that church planting in Texas is a need that [First Baptist Church in Devine] can and should seek to address as we seek to be obedient to the Great Commission," he stated.

"We are also historically Baptist and interested in preserving historic Baptist distinctives, such as the distinctive of local church autonomy. As my congregation has become better informed about NAMB's processes and expectations, it's not clear that we can partner with them without sacrificing our autonomy, nor actually better reaching our community for Christ."

*Based in part on a Baptist Press report by North American Mission Board communications, with additional reporting by Calli Keener and Ken Camp.*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This story was corrected after receiving further clarification of who may attend the meetings. The fourth paragraph with information about Houston-area meetings was added after receiving confirmation by Union Baptist Association.*