

Foster Care Summit addresses urgent needs

April 24, 2018

DALLAS—Texas Baptist leaders met at an April 16 summit to discuss the foster care crisis in Texas and seek ways for churches and ministries to respond.

Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director David Hardage, who convened the Foster Care Summit, discussed the escalating crisis in recent years and his desire to see Texas Baptists make a difference.

“It seems like God is asking us, as Texas Baptists, to step into this area in a big way—collectively, collaboratively, cooperatively,” Hardage said. “My dream is that we solve this problem.”

Representatives from BGCT-affiliated agencies Buckner International, the STARRY program of Children at Heart Ministries, South Texas Children’s Home and BCFS, formerly Baptist Child and Family Services, described ways their institutions work in foster care and adoption ministry.

Additionally, ministers and lay leaders from First Baptist Church in Mineral Wells, Shearer Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio, First Baptist Church in Belton and Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler discussed church-initiated ministry through foster care.



Nathan and Kayla Buchanan of Mineral Wells are pictured in a Christmas card photo with their three biological daughters (left to right) Elaina, Kate and Olivia, along with a foster son whose image is obscured due to foster-care system privacy regulations.

“We have this heart of God, this desire as God does, to take care of the fatherless,” said [Nathan Buchanan](#), a foster parent and pastor of First Baptist in Mineral Wells.

Buchanan outlined many biblical examples of foster care and adoption, including the stories of Moses, Esther and Jesus.

“Caring for an orphan teaches us about loving a person who may be slow to love us back,” he said.

Orphan care helps the world see God’s heart, displays faith in action and is the perfect picture of a relationship with God the Father, he added.

State of foster care in Texas examined

In 2017, about 19,700 Texas children were removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect, said JoAnn Cole, vice president for foster care at [Buckner International](#). Currently, more than 32,000 children are in foster care in the state, and more than 7,000 are ready to be adopted due to terminated parental rights, she added.

In spite of the challenges, “there is hope that I’ve seen in the last few years as our Texas Baptists churches stood up and been a part of what’s happening,” Cole asserted. “I think God is calling believers to stand up and do even more.”

Sarah Smith, manager of volunteer recruitment and outreach for CASA—court-appointed special advocates—in Dallas, noted CASA volunteers seek what is best for children, many times providing the only unpaid perspective in a courtroom during foster care proceedings.

“Our role is to look out for the child’s best interest,” Smith said. “We’ve found that our child welfare system isn’t doing a good enough job focusing on our kids and having the right amount of time to do what is necessary for our kids.”

Quality foster homes needed

Eron Green, president of [South Texas Children’s Home Ministries](#), emphasized the church’s role in providing high-quality foster homes for vulnerable children.

“As believers, we are the answer to the foster care problem in our country,” he said. “If we as churches have been doing what we are called to do there would be no reason to have a CPS ... because we would be stepping up as believers to help those in our community and loving them where they are.”

He stressed the importance of quality over quantity.

“We don’t need more foster homes,” Green said. “We need more quality, well-supported foster homes.”

He suggested a model for foster care families in which three to five families surround and support each family engaged in fostering children. The additional families would help provide respite, encourage mental health and prevent burnout after only a few months of caring for children.

Green encouraged churches interested in beginning foster care ministries to talk with those who have successful programs already in place. Rather than jumping into a situation where there is a lack of knowledge or training, he suggested, church leaders should seek advice and counsel from trusted partners on best practices and helpful resources.

Essential needs for church-based ministry



Kevin Burdette, director of Hope for 100 through Green Acres Baptist Church, talk about 10 years of ministry in foster and adoptive care. (Photo / Kirsten McKimmey)

Kevin Burdette, director of [Hope for 100](#) through Green Acres Baptist

Church, talked about starting the church's foster care and orphan ministry 10 years ago.

Burdette, an adoptive dad and CASA volunteer, said ministry efforts should start with prayer. In helping sister churches begin foster care and adoption ministries, he also noted the essential need for support from the church's senior pastor.

Green Acres Baptist Church members support foster care and adoptive families through multiple initiatives including a kids' night out with a free night of child-care once a month, wrap-around families to support and encourage foster families, and post-adoption encouragement through the church's Forever Families ministry.

"If there is anything the BGCT could do, it would be to encourage senior pastors to take up that gauntlet and encourage their churches to get involved," Burdette said.

Buchanan from Mineral Wells encouraged leaders to find an agency, network or group to partner with as a church.

Another suggestion raised at the summit was hosting an "orphan Sunday" to tell the story of children in a church's community who are in need of love and care.

As summit participants discussed next steps for Texas Baptists' involvement on a statewide level, increasing awareness among the 5,300 churches affiliated with the convention was a primary concern.

BGCT Executive Board staff leaders pledged to meet with other state leaders involved in foster and adoptive care, connect churches seeking involvement with those who can help them most efficiently create a foster care toolbox of resources for churches and prayerfully seek God's direction regarding additional ways to care for foster children across the state.