

Grant to Baylor Social Work spurs questions (Updated)

July 3, 2025

Baylor University recently announced—and then rescinded—a grant focused on the study of the “disenfranchisement and exclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals and women” in churches.

On June 30, Baylor University’s Diana R. Garland School of Social Work [announced](#) a grant awarded to Baylor’s Center for Church and Community Impact, or C3I. The nearly \$644,000 grant from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation will fund a study “to help foster inclusion and belonging in the church.”

“This grant will help us better understand the disenfranchisement and exclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals and women within congregations to nurture institutional courage and foster change,” the announcement reads.

Courage from the Margins: Inclusion and Belonging Practices for LGBTQIA+ and Women in Congregations is the study funded by the \$643,401 grant.

In his weekly email, Texas Baptists Executive Director Julio Guarneri responded to “questions and concerns among several” about the announcement. Acknowledging “we are trying to learn more about what this means,” Guarneri cited several certainties among Texas Baptists.

Linda Livingstone, Baylor University president, [issued a statement](#) for Baylor faculty, staff and alumni on July 9 stating that “Dean Jon Singletary and principal investigator Dr. Gaynor Yancey have voluntarily offered to rescind their acceptance of this grant on behalf of the School of Social Work and return all associated funds to the Baugh Foundation.

“We recognize that this situation has caused concern and confusion for many within the Baylor Family and among our broader community of churches, partner organizations, and supporters. This has been a learning opportunity for many involved in this situation, and we aim to work alongside our college and school leaders, faculty, and research community, particularly during these challenging times for higher education.”

Livingstone added that Baylor will remain “committed to its unique role as a Christian research university—one that encourages rigorous inquiry and thoughtful exploration of complex issues. We will continue to support our faculty and researchers in pursuing meaningful scholarship, while ensuring that such work aligns with our institutional processes.”

Julio Guarneri, Texas Baptists executive director, expressed his appreciation for Baylor’s decision.

“I am thankful for this decision made by Baylor leadership,” Guarneri said.

“The decision is consistent with Baylor’s policies and statement on human sexuality. We appreciate Baylor President Linda Livingstone and Truett Seminary Dean Todd Still for their commitment to these biblical and historical principles and for their leadership,” Guarneri added.

Focus and goal of C3I study

The *Courage from the Margins* study “will focus on the lived experiences of emerging adults. It will assist us in filling out the bigger picture of congregations’ practices that result in an environment of belonging,” Gaynor Yancey, director of the [Center for Church and Community Impact](#) (C3I) and Lake Family Endowed Chair in Congregational and Community Health, said.

“Through our research, we want to expand our picture of what

congregations do and do not do in their caring practices with all people about their experiences of belonging” Yancey added.

According to the announcement, “Many LGBTQIA+ individuals and women experience what researchers call ‘institutional betrayal’ within their faith communities—situations where the institutions they depend on for spiritual support fail to protect them or even actively harm them,” a focus of C3I’s work.

This failure or harm “might involve exclusion from church activities, family estrangement and painful conflicts that leave lasting emotional wounds.”

The study “prioritizes [marginalized] voices, giving them a safe space to share their experiences and guide positive change within faith communities. ... Listening to and understanding the stories of these often-marginalized populations can promote a trauma-sensitive sense of belonging, cultural humility and institutional courage in congregations.”

“Social work values and competence through the ethical integration of faith and practice prompt C3I to constantly and consistently nudge faith-based organizations to be proactive in establishing institutional courage,” the announcement states.

“The study will help congregations develop greater cultural sensitivity and humility, trauma-informed approaches to ministry, concrete steps toward genuine inclusion, and environments where all members can thrive.”

Study methodology

“Researchers will recruit two groups of 25” emerging adults ages 18-24 “from across the country ... to a series of confidential interviews, focus groups, and surveys to facilitate a deeper understanding of their lived experiences with congregations.”

Data gathered “will directly inform trauma-sensitive training resources that C3I will develop for congregational use, providing guidance on inclusivity and institutional courage.”

Further, “C3I will pilot the curriculum at a gathering of congregations, measuring success through attendance and feedback specific to what a congregation plans to implement, such as the adoption of more inclusive language.

“Findings [from the pilot] will be shared through online publications, digital platforms, faith-based conferences and academic articles.”

Gratitude for grant

“The generous support of the Baugh Foundation allows C3I to deepen its work at the intersection of faith, justice and community and is both timely and essential,” Jon Singletary, dean of Baylor’s Garland School of Social Work, said.

“We are always so grateful for the support and encouragement of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation for our ongoing research in assisting congregations in ministering to marginalized populations,” Yancey said.

“For several years, they have assisted us with funding for research to study the inclusionary practices of congregations with people who are marginalized in numerous ways,” she added.

“Congregations have the potential to be spaces of healing and belonging, yet too often they become sources of exclusion and harm. This grant equips us to listen deeply, study carefully and partner faithfully with churches seeking to become more just and welcoming communities,” Singletary added.

“This is about our hearts, for sure, and how we act on God’s softening of

our hearts toward those who live life in the margins and shadows, rarely experiencing a sense of belonging,” Yancey stated. “Congregations are uniquely positioned in community life to be those places of care.”

Texas Baptist position

“While we are trying to learn more about what this means, there are things that are certain and which I want to communicate to you,” Guarneri wrote in his July 3 weekly email update. “We are seeking to learn more from Baylor’s leadership so that we can decide how to best move forward.”

Guarneri reaffirmed the Baptist General Convention of Texas’ position on marriage, sexuality and gender: “Texas Baptists remains committed to our conviction that biblical sexuality is a gift from God, which consists of a relationship between a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage.

“While we consider any sexual behavior outside of the above definition of biblical marriage sinful, we strive to love every person with the desire that they would be faithful followers of Christ,” Guarneri added.

“We also believe that God created every human being as either male or female. Gender is not a choice but a gift from God. This has not changed for us,” Guarneri added.

Further, “in our commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, we believe that every human being is made in the image of God and is worthy of dignity, respect and love.”

In keeping with this commitment, Guarneri pointed Texas Baptists to resources prepared by the Texas Baptists Christian Life Commission “for churches to learn how to minister to those struggling with gender identity. Our desire is for our churches to be welcoming and loving of all people while remaining true to the biblical standards of holiness and God’s

design.”

BGCT/Baylor relationship

Responding to questions about the BGCT’s relationship with Baylor University, Guarneri acknowledged “the relationship has changed over the years. In contrast with the universities that are affiliated with us, our relationship with Baylor University is by special agreement.”

This special agreement has funding and governance implications, Guarneri explained.

“Cooperative Program funding does not support Baylor’s general budget,” Guarneri stated. “We designate our funding for scholarships of ministers’ children, the work of the Baptist Student Ministry, which Texas Baptists oversees, and ministry student scholarships exclusively.”

Additionally, the “BGCT elects approximately 25 percent of Baylor’s board of regents, allowing Texas Baptists to have a voice but not control of the university,” he continued.

For those asking about Baylor’s and Truett Theological Seminary’s position on sexuality, Guarneri stated [Truett’s “is essentially the same as the BGCT’s](#) and not unlike that of [Baylor University’s](#).”

“Pastors and leaders who are concerned or have questions are encouraged to contact [Baylor] University and Truett Seminary administration,” Guarneri added.

Statement from Baylor University

Baptist Standard contacted Baylor University administration following Guarneri’s weekly update and received the following statement:

“Baylor’s institutional beliefs, policies, and statements have not changed. Our commitment to our Christian mission and identity remains steadfast, and we continue to uphold the biblical values that have long shaped our University’s foundation.

“In particular, Baylor affirms the biblical understanding of human sexuality as a gift from God. Christian churches across the ages and around the world have affirmed purity in singleness and fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman as the biblical norm. This conviction continues to guide our institutional policies and our approach to student life, academics and spiritual formation.

“It is important to understand [the *Courage from the Margins* study] is not an activist endeavor aimed at changing our Baptist churches or redefining biblical truth. Rather, it is an educational program designed to equip church leaders with resources and perspectives to engage on these difficult issues within their congregations thoughtfully and pastorally and to better understand and, specifically, minister to individuals who may feel marginalized or excluded.”

Editor’s Note: The story originally was posted July. 3. It was updated July 9 to include statements from Baylor University President Linda Livingstone.