

Lewisville pastor to be nominated for BGCT president

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FORT WORTH—Stephen Hatfield, a pastor and co-leader of a committee charged with charting the Baptist General Convention of Texas' future, will be a candidate for BGCT president when the convention meets this fall.

Hatfield, 53, is pastor of [First Baptist Church of Lewisville](#), a Denton County suburb of Dallas. He also is co-chairman of the BGCT Future Focus Committee, which is working to develop a strategic plan for the state convention.

Bill Tolar, retired longtime theology professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, announced he will nominate Hatfield for the presidency when the BGCT meets in Fort Worth Nov. 10-11.



Stephen Hatfield

Hatfield will enter an open race, since incumbent President Joy Fenner said she will not seek another term.

"I had not intended to run for a second term," Fenner said. Her decision

follows a precedent set four years ago, when Ken Hall decided to serve a single one-year term. Previously, BGCT presidents traditionally served two terms, the maximum allowed by convention policy. Since then, presidents Albert Reyes, Michael Bell, Steve Vernon and now Fenner decided to limit themselves to one term.

“I’ve enjoyed serving as president,” said Fenner, the convention’s first female president. “It’s been very meaningful, and I think I’ve helped in some ways. But I don’t see myself running for a second term.”

Also, Hatfield and any other candidates are unlikely to encounter a nominee selected and promoted by Texas Baptists Committed, a grassroots political group created to protect the state from the ultraconservative movement that gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s and ’90s.

For more than 20 years, [Texas Baptists Committed](#) endorsed the winning BGCT presidential candidate. But that won’t happen this year, TBC Executive Director David Currie said.

“It’s my understanding—but the board hasn’t taken a vote on this—we are not planning to endorse candidates this year,” Currie said.

“What we have said is that anyone who runs for BGCT office should support the mission and ministry of the BGCT and be opposed to fundamentalist control of the BGCT,” he added. “We’ve settled that, and we don’t want to revisit that battle.”

Currie offered one caveat, noting, “If a candidate supported a fundamentalist takeover, we would tell people about it.”

But at this point in BGCT history, a presidential election without TBC endorsement would be good for the convention, Currie said, noting, “We’re open to several strongly supportive BGCT pastors running without our

direct involvement.”

“Stephen would bring a very positive spirit of leadership to the Baptist General Convention of Texas,” Tolar said of Hatfield. “He’s a person of real character. He’s what I call ‘high integrity’—honest, genuine in faith and commitment to Christian values, and committed to Baptist corporate, cooperative work.”

Tolar and Hatfield have known each other for decades.

“I’ve known Stephen’s family well. His father (Lawson Hatfield) was the state Sunday school director for Baptists in Arkansas,” Tolar said, noting Hatfield learned about the importance of both local churches and Baptist denominationalism as a boy growing up.

“He is a denominationally conscientious and committed person. He loves the Lord and has seen the value of Baptist people working together.”

Tolar chose Hatfield to be his “grader”—graduate assistant—while the young minister worked on his doctoral degree at Southwestern Seminary. Tolar also has preached in Hatfield’s churches and knows Hatfield’s wife and children.

Through their close contact, Tolar has observed qualities that would make Hatfield a strong leader for Texas Baptists, he said.

“Stephen loves the Lord and loves people. He loves Texas Baptists and is committed to kingdom work,” Tolar said. “He has a servant’s heart and strong character. He is not driven by ambition or desire for power. He’s the pastor of a very dynamic church.”

Leadership traits

With the BGCT’s new executive director, Randel Everett, beginning his tenure this spring, Hatfield offers leadership traits that would serve the

convention well during a time of transition, Tolar added.

“The convention is undergoing significant changes, and Stephen brings vision, intelligence and character that are crucial for this important time. We need wise leadership,” he said. “Stephen would bring qualities that would enable him to work well with the new executive director—intelligence, a good sense of humor, an upbeat personality. He has a positive spirit about him that would be good for Texas Baptists.”

For his part, Hatfield said he is motivated by love and appreciation for the BGCT, as well as a desire to make the convention and its institutions stronger.

“One of the reasons I love the BGCT and have led churches to support it is that when you give through the Texas Cooperative Program (the convention’s unified budget), you not only support missions and evangelism, but also our institutions,” he said.

“If elected, I would seek to strengthen the ties between our churches and institutions,” Hatfield said. “I’d want to foster greater cooperation in our work—to communicate the great opportunities our churches have when we channel our giving through the Cooperative Program.

“I’d also want to listen to our churches, discern their values and respect their giving patterns.”

Future Focus Committee

Hatfield co-chairs the Future Focus Committee with Andy Pittman, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lufkin. The committee recently held its first meeting, and it is mandated to present recommendations to the BGCT by its 2009 annual meeting.

Through the committee’s initial work, Hatfield has learned some lessons,

he said.

“I’ve already discovered the Texas Cooperative Program will be measured by the values and priorities the churches have felt led to pursue, and these begin with missions and evangelism,” he explained.

Also, the committee’s initial conversations have illustrated the BGCT operates “in a world of new paradigms as well as time-tested initiatives,” he said.

For example, he pointed to the missions connections of his own church, First Baptist of Lewisville. “In addition to the BGCT, we relate to the Southern Baptist Convention, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Willow Creek Association. We engage in missions in Guatemala through a partnership with Buckner International, but we also conduct missions on our own initiative,” he said. “We love and respect the BGCT and want to make it as effective as possible.”

Challenges

In addition to his service on the Future Focus Committee, Hatfield is a member of the BGCT Executive Board and a former chairman of the BGCT Administrative Committee. Those experiences have given him impressions about the “challenges and opportunities” facing the convention, he said. They include:

- *“The BGCT needs to see itself as a channel for giving, not as an organization that exists for itself. We always come back to the convention’s mandate for supporting the churches for missions and evangelism.”*
- *“The BGCT’s central operational structure (the Executive Board staff) must be flattened. We’ve been trying, but we’ve got a long way to go. We can learn from other conventions and organizations. We need to be*

streamlined, compelling, effective.”

- *“We must stay connected to the churches and encourage the churches. We must get the message to them that makes them want to participate in the convention.”*
- *“We can unify our churches behind clear objectives, moving forward with what Randel Everett calls ‘our kingdom assignment.’”*

Hatfield affirmed the new executive director, noting First Baptist Church in Lewisville will enthusiastically support Everett’s first initiative, the Texas Hope 2010 evangelism/missions campaign to present the gospel to all Texans and feed the hungry across Texas by Easter 2010.

Lewisville pastorate

Hatfield has been pastor of the Lewisville church since 1993.

In 2007, the church had 3,807 resident members, averaged 1,382 participants in Sunday morning worship and baptized 57 new Christians. It had \$5,005,371 in total receipts, \$3,868,672 in undesignated receipts, \$614,927 in total missions expenditures, and \$350,094 in Cooperative Program allocations.

Previously, he was pastor of First Baptist Church in Grandview and First Baptist Church in Venus, as well as two churches in Arkansas, and associate pastor of Mountain Lake Baptist Church in Dallas.

In addition to his work on the Executive Board as well as the Future Focus and Administrative committees, he served on the BGCT Committee on Convention Arrangements. He is a member of the B.H. Carroll Theological Institute’s board of governors and has been moderator of the Denton and Johnson Baptist associations.

He earned doctorate and master's degrees from Southwestern Seminary and a bachelor's degree from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas.

He and his wife, Marcie, are the parents of five children.