

Proposed committee will study annual meeting participation

October 21, 2009

Messengers to the Baptist General Convention of Texas [annual meeting](#) in Houston, Nov. 16-17, will be asked to create a committee to study why their numbers have been diminishing in recent years—and what can be done to reverse the trend.

Paul Kenley, pastor of Grace Fellowship Church in Lampasas, will present a motion on behalf of the committee on convention business recommending a committee be created to study “changes to the BGCT annual meeting that would enhance interest and participation from a broader spectrum of participating churches.”

The recommendation—approved unanimously by the committee on convention business—calls for a committee limited to 11 members appointed by convention officers by the end of the 2009 annual meeting. The schedule of the committee’s meeting would be set following determination of funding for its work.

The proposed motion calls for the committee to report its recommendations to the 2010 annual meeting in McAllen.

Everything on the table

“We’d like to see everything on the table—when the meeting is scheduled, where it is held and what it looks like,” said Kenley, who initiated the motion in the committee on convention business.

Weekday events held in downtown venues—where meals and lodging typically are expensive—may need to be reconsidered in order to involve

more laypeople, bivocational ministers and pastors whose churches do not pay their expenses, he noted.

Time of year may also need to be considered, Kenley added. A summer meeting might be better attended than a fall gathering when school is in session, he noted.

Considering many BGCT Executive Board staff are required to attend the annual meeting, a fixed site in the Dallas-Fort Worth area could be a potential cost-saving measure that would eliminate many travel expenses borne by the convention, he added.

“We’ve got to change the fact that many people don’t see the need in coming to the annual meeting,” said Jeane Law of First Baptist Church in Lubbock, chair of the committee on convention business.

On a fast track

By asking that the convention officers name the study committee by the end of the 2009 annual meeting and calling for a report to the 2010 meeting, the committee on convention business is seeking to put the issue on a “fast track,” Law said.

Even so, she noted, major changes in schedule and format could take several years to implement.

“What we hope to put into place is something that will draw young people and that should serve the convention in the years ahead,” she said.

BGCT President David Lowrie, pastor of First Baptist Church in Canyon, reported the convention officers have met to discuss the proposed study committee. The officers have developed “a working list” of potential committee members but have not asked anyone to serve.

“We want to have a cross-section of Texas Baptist life represented, and we

want people who will help us think creatively about the future,” he said.

The 2008 BGCT annual meeting in Fort Worth drew 1,891 registered messengers from 550 churches—the lowest number since the 1949 meeting in El Paso.

In contrast, the largest meeting in BGCT history—the 1991 annual meeting in Waco, when the convention was dealing with controversy surrounding a charter change for Baylor University—drew 11,159. Excluding that year, the average number of messengers at annual meetings in the 1990s was 5,941.

After the 2000 annual meeting in Corpus Christi, which drew 6,713 messengers, the numbers dropped to 3,317 in 2001 and 3,327 in 2002. The convention hasn't reached the 3,000-messenger level since then, and the numbers have declined every year since 2004.