

Sex offenders permanently disqualified, BGCT board declares

September 28, 2021

The Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board approved a policy declaring any registered sex offender “permanently disqualified” from church leadership.

A committee-recommended policy would have stated any congregation allowing registered sex offenders in church leadership roles “will be considered out of harmonious cooperation” with the state convention.

Instead, the board approved an amended policy statement that any church violating the standard “may be” rather than “will be” considered outside of harmonious cooperation with Texas Baptists.

Chad Edgington of First Baptist Church in Olney made the amendment, suggesting the BGCT needed flexibility to consider exceptional situations “on a case-by-case basis.”

Several board members expressed a desire to send a “strong statement” about sexual abuse, while allowing some latitude to consider individual circumstances. Cindy Wiles of First Baptist Church in Arlington cited the example of churches geared toward ministry to ex-offenders.

Help churches ‘think rightly about

best practices’

In 2016, messengers to the BGCT annual meeting granted the Executive Board authority to remove churches from affiliation with the BGCT.

At the time, the convention identified four criteria to determine whether churches are in “harmonious cooperation” with the BGCT—praying for its work, supporting the BGCT financially, engaging in convention ministries and affirming “biblical marriage as between one man and one woman in covenant relationship with the Lord and each other.”



Bob Temple, chair of the administrative support committee, presents a recommendation to the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board. (Photo / Ken Camp)

At the recommendation of its administrative support committee, the board added a fifth item related to registered sex offenders serving in church leadership positions.

The background document presented to the board as part of the recommended policy addendum “affirms the autonomy of the local church in all matters of governance including the selection of leaders.”

However, it also noted “conventions and associations of churches may help one another think rightly about best practices regarding issues such as the protection of children and vulnerable adults from those with a history of sexual abuse or exploitation.”

So, the board approved the following amended policy statement: “The Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas maintains that any registered sex offender, having sexually abused and/or exploited others, should be permanently disqualified from serving in leadership positions in the church. Churches which violate this standard may be considered out of harmonious cooperation with the churches of the BGCT.”

Board approves GC2 statement of faith

At its Sept. 27-28 meeting in Dallas, the board also approved a statement of faith for the “GC2 movement”—an emphasis on the Great Commission and the Great Commandment identified as “a movement of God’s people to share Christ and show love.”

The “reasonable summary” statement of “core theological truths” includes some hot-button social issues not included in the 1963 Baptist Faith & Message, the statement of faith adopted by BGCT annual meeting messengers.

The GC2 statement affirms “the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death,” defines marriage in terms of one man and one woman, and identifies gender exclusively as male and female.

Texas Baptists need a succinct explanation of their theological identity when the convention is approached by groups or entities asking if they can relate to the BGCT, Executive Director David Hardage explained.

“The Lord is continually presenting Texas Baptists with the opportunity to

collaborate with like-minded, orthodox, evangelical Christians in the USA and around the world who are increasingly uncomfortable with the extremes of pharisaical fundamentalism or culturally accommodating liberalism," the background rationale for the recommendation stated.

"The need exists for a big-tent approach to missions and ministry that affirms the historic truths of Scripture and Baptist distinctives. This organic movement has created an opportunity for Texas Baptists to lead the way in offering a new vision for collaboration: the GC2 Movement."

The statement of faith affirms historic Christian doctrines such as the Triune God; Jesus Christ as the head of the church; Christ's virgin birth, atoning death, resurrection and return; the Bible as "God's word and truth without mixture of error;" the "urgent need to reach the lost with the good news of Jesus;" the Lord's Supper and baptism as the ordinances of the church; salvation "by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone;" "the priesthood of every believer and all believers;" and "the autonomy of the local church in governance and ordination."

In addition to the statement about the sanctity of human life, it also includes affirmations "that gender is a gift from God who creates humankind male and female in the divine image and likeness" and "that biblical marriage is one man and one woman in a covenant relationship with the Lord and one another."

The rationale for the statement of faith indicated it is not intended to replace either the 1963 or 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, the proposal presented to the board stated. Rather, it is meant to "function as a guide for collaboration with like-minded conventions, denominations, churches, ministries, foundations, institutions or Christians."

"The GC2 Statement of Faith is meant to be a summary of the core beliefs we hold dear," the proposal stated. "While we affirm many additional

theological truths not included in the GC2 statement, the inclusion of additional doctrines inevitably limits the potential for networking and collaboration.”

Recommends \$34.6 million budget

In other business, the board recommended a \$34,588,280 total Texas budget for 2022, a \$321,592 increase over the 2021 budget. Messengers from Texas Baptist churches will vote on the proposed budget at the BGCT annual meeting in Galveston, Nov. 14-16.

The board’s budget recommendation projects a \$32.8 million net Texas budget—based on Cooperative Program giving and investment income—for 2022. The budget proposal depends on \$27.37 million in Texas Cooperative Program receipts from churches.

The recommended 2022 budget anticipates slightly more than \$5.4 million in investment income. It also anticipates more than \$1.77 million in additional revenue from conference and booth fees, product sales and other sources.

The board also recommended continued division of undesignated receipts from affiliated churches, with 79 percent allocated for the BGCT and 21 percent for worldwide causes. Each church determines the recipient or recipients of its worldwide giving.

If approved at the annual meeting, an anticipated \$1 million in worldwide missions initiatives and partnerships will be allocated in this manner: \$340,000 for missions mobilization, \$200,000 for River Ministry and Mexico missions, \$100,000 for Texas Partnerships, \$55,000 for the Baptist World Alliance, \$5,000 for the North American Baptist Fellowship, \$50,000 for intercultural international initiatives, \$200,000 for Go Now Missions, \$20,000 for the Hispanic Education Task Force and \$30,000 for chaplaincy.

Officers reelected

The BGCT Executive Board reelected Clint Davis, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Mount Pleasant, as chair and Bobby Contreras, pastor of Alamo Heights Baptist Church in San Antonio, as vice chair.

During the meeting, members of the Executive Board donated more than \$1,000 to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions after Davis called for an impromptu offering—noting his own contribution was in lieu of participating in a Mary Hill Davis 5K run.

The board granted autonomy to STARRY, previously the foster care and adoption affiliate of Children at Heart Ministries. STARRY, which is funded primarily through government contracts, requested independence from Children at Heart Ministries, and the trustee board approved the request, pending Executive Board endorsement. The Executive Board also adopted the modified restated certificate of formation for Children at Heart Ministries.

The BGCT Executive Board approved building exchanges for Baptist Student Ministries in Galveston and at Texas State University. The board also authorized the purchase of property adjacent to the West Texas A&M University BSM building for up to \$400,000.

The board approved the establishment of a new ministry “focused on assisting our Texas Baptist churches in reaching, discipling, developing and utilizing single adults beyond college.” Funds for single adult ministry are included in the proposed 2022 Cooperative Program budget.

The board filled vacancies on several

councils and commissions by electing:

- Abigail Rojas from Azle Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Bryant Lee from Higher Expectations Church in Humble, Alice Ward from Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Kalie Lowrie from First Baptist Church in Brownwood and Emmanuel Roldan from Primera Iglesia Bautista in Waco to the Christian Life Commission.
- David Cross from First Baptist Church in Lumberton; George Will Bearden from First Baptist Church in San Antonio; Sara Hester from First Baptist Church in Oneonta, Ala.; Robert Pipkin from West End Baptist Church in Suffolk, Va.; and Rachelle Binion from Invitation American Baptist Church in Sioux Falls, S.D., to the Chaplaincy Endorsement Council.
- Joshua Hays from First Baptist Church in Waco and C.V. Blake from First Baptist Church in Abilene to the GC2 Press Advisory Council.
- Rolando Aguirre from Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Felipe Garza from Bill Harrod Memorial Baptist Church in Dallas, Tina Cooper from Calvary Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, David Reyes from Fielder Church in Arlington and Pablo Juarez from First Baptist Church in Kaufman to the Hispanic Education Initiative Council.
- Alan Grisham from First Baptist Church in Buffalo and Leonard Hatcher from Oasis Baptist Church in Dallas to the Ministerial Health Council.
- Oza Jones from Westside Baptist Church in Lewisville and Ryan Jespersen from Hillcrest Baptist Church in Cedar Hill to the Missional Engagement Coordinating Council.
- Bill Skaar from First Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, Robert White from Freedom Church in Bedford, Fernando Rojas from Azle Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Ken Holden from Park Cities

Baptist Church in Dallas and Charlotte Greenhaw from First Baptist Church in Garland to the Missions Funding Council.

- Ed Dyer from Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, Steve Dalrymple from First Baptist Church in Amarillo, Alice Curtis from Agape Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Jack Woodworth from Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Pat Hyde from First Baptist Church in Kenedy, Carla Robinson from Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Michael Griffin from Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas and Ben Raimer from First Baptist Church in Galveston to the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation Council.
- Dan Upchurch from Sunset Canyon Baptist Church in Dripping Springs and David Smith from First Baptist Church in Quanah to the Theological Education Council.
- Tuffy Loftin from the Cowboy Church of Leon County in Centerville and Jerry Stewart from Lone Star Cowboy Church in Lubbock to the Western Heritage Council.