

Texas Baptists Committed to cease operations

July 10, 2017

Texas Baptists Committed—the moderate organization that for nearly three decades resisted a “fundamentalist takeover” of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and its affiliated churches—will cease operations at the end of July.

Lack of financial support

The group’s board of directors voted July 7 to close, citing lack of financial support.

“From one standpoint, this has been an easy decision—we simply no longer have the funds to sustain this ministry,” TBC Executive Director Bill Jones wrote July 8 on the organization’s [blog](#) and to readers of the TBC Weekly Baptist Roundup electronic newsletter. “From another standpoint, this has been a difficult, gut-wrenching decision.”

More than 18 months ago, Jones and the board convened a meeting at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas to discuss the organization’s future.

“At that meeting, I announced that I planned to step down by July 1, 2017, and suggested that, for TBC to make a significant impact, the board needed to look for an executive director who is younger than I am and has stronger credentials, and provide that executive director with a staff—at a minimum, an associate executive director and secretarial assistance,” Jones wrote. “Unfortunately, the funds never materialized to support any of that.”

‘Battle fatigue’ sets in

During its heyday in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, TBC

mobilized thousands of messengers to vote for moderate candidates for BGCT office at the state convention's annual meetings.

However, after the "Baptist battles" ceased in the Southern Baptist Convention in the early 1990s and Baptists in Texas who supported the direction the SBC formed a state convention in 1998 to compete with the BGCT, interest waned, and support for TBC decreased.

"With no visible 'battle' for control of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, as there was through most of the 1990s, many Baptists just haven't felt the urgent need for a 'watchdog' like Texas Baptists Committed," Jones wrote. "'Battle fatigue' was a factor, too."

How Texas Baptists Committed originated

In 1988, moderates concerned about the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention created Baptists Committed as a national organization, with an office in Houston. That group included many of the leaders and financial supporters of Laity for the Baptist Faith & Message, formed in 1985.

A few months later, moderates in Texas created a state chapter of Baptists Committed, and the group hired San Angelo rancher David Currie as field coordinator and Oeita Bottorff of Houston as project director.

In 1992, the national organization ceased to exist, as many moderate churches turned their allegiance from the SBC to the new Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

However, Texas Baptists Committed continued with Currie as executive director, and the organization focused on supporting a slate of moderate candidates for election at each BGCT annual meeting.

After many congregations that supported the "conservative resurgence" within the SBC withdrew from the BGCT in 1998 to form the Southern

Baptists of Texas Convention, contested officer elections at the BGCT became uncommon.

So, for the next decade, TBC focused primarily on helping pastor-search committees identify ministerial candidates who would not seek to lead their congregations away from the BGCT.

At the same time, TBC continued to work behind the scenes to influence BGCT officer elections, calling for increased diversity in leadership posts. With TBC endorsement, the BGCT elected the first Hispanic president, Albert Reyes, and the first African-American president, Michael Bell, as well as the first two women to serve in that role—Joy Fenner and Kathy Hillman.

In September 2009, Currie retired as TBC executive director. After more than a year of minimal activity by the organization, the board elected Jones as executive director in January 2011.

Optimism and concern about the future

Looking to the future, Jones noted optimism about the future of Fellowship Southwest—a new Cooperative Baptist Fellowship network that includes Texas, Oklahoma and the Western United States. Marv Knox will step down as editor of the *Baptist Standard* July 31 to become the network's coordinator.

However, he voiced concern about the BGCT's future, citing friendly overtures by BGCT Executive Director David Hardage toward Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and actions messengers to the 2016 BGCT annual meeting approved to remove from fellowship congregations that identify as welcoming and affirming of LGBT individuals.

“A lot of us will not be messengers (to BGCT annual meetings) any more,

and the vote on the next issue that comes up won't be as close next time," Jones said in an interview. He is a member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, one of the congregations the BGCT voted to disfellowship.

In recent years, Jones said, when he met with BGCT Executive Board staff leaders, he realized TBC "didn't have influence anymore, because they didn't feel a threat as keenly."

Fellowship Southwest will provide "a more robust CBF presence" in Texas, and Jones voiced confidence it will provide a home for churches and individuals committed to principles such as the priesthood of every believer, soul competency, local church autonomy, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and freedom to interpret Scripture.

However, he acknowledged, the network will not political in nature, and with the demise of TBC, the task of championing "historic Baptist distinctives" within BGCT life will fall to "individual watchdogs."

"If we were to see clear evidence the BGCT is departing from Baptist principles, I wonder if there could be support to recreate something along the order of TBC—some kind of organized effort," Jones said.