

# Texas Baptists elect Lowrie president, refer name change to Executive Board

November 11, 2008

FORT WORTH—At a Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting that drew the lowest number of registered messengers in 59 years, participants elected the convention's first second-generation president, deferred action on a proposed name change for the BGCT and approved a reduced budget for 2009.

The annual meeting drew 1,891 registered messengers from 550 churches—the lowest number since the 1949 meeting in El Paso. In addition, 713 visitors also registered at the Fort Worth meeting.



Newly elected officers of the Baptist General Convention of Texas are (left to right) Bobby Broyles of First Baptist Church in Ballinger, second vice president; David Lowrie of First Baptist Church in Canyon, president; and Carolyn Strickland of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, first vice president.  
(PHOTO/Brianna McLane/Baylor)

David Lowrie, pastor of First Baptist Church in Canyon, garnered 53 percent of the votes for president—735 as compared to 644 for Stephen Hatfield, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lewisville.

Bruce Webb, pastor of First Baptist Church in the Woodlands, nominated

Lowrie, characterizing him as “thoroughly biblical ... unapologetically centered on Jesus Christ ... (and) liberal in his love toward all people.”

Lowrie possesses the strength to “listen to the Lord’s voice rather than the voice of the crowd,” Webb said.

Last year, Lowrie narrowly lost the president’s race to Joy Fenner, retired executive director of Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas. Texas Baptists Committed—the organization that mobilized political opposition to prevent a fundamentalist takeover of the BGCT—had endorsed Fenner. This year, for the first time in two decades, the group chose not to endorse candidates, answering the call from some Texas Baptists for “open” convention elections.

Lowrie, 48, becomes the first second-generation BGCT president. His father, longtime First Baptist Church of Lubbock Pastor D.L. Lowrie, served two one-year terms in the early 1980s.



Charles Whiteside, a member of First Baptist Church in Kilgore, introduces a motion asking the Executive Board and BGCT staff to research new ways to assist churches with fewer than 50 in attendance. (BGCT PHOTO)

Carolyn Strickland, a deacon at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, drew 52 percent of the votes cast for first vice president—728 as compared to 668 for Ken Coffee, retired associate director of the BGCT State Missions Commission.

George Mason, pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church, noted Strickland’s passionate desire to “call Texas Baptists to live out the whole gospel, body as well as soul ... and see that no child goes hungry as long as there is

something we can do about it.”

Her late husband, Phil, served 38 years with the BGCT Christian Life Commission, including about a quarter-century as director of the social concerns and public policy agency.

Messengers elected Bobby Broyles, pastor of First Baptist Church in Ballinger, by acclamation as second vice president.



Bruce Webb,  
pastor of First  
Baptist Church in  
the Woodlands,  
nominates David  
Lowrie of First  
Baptist Church in  
Canyon for  
president of the  
Baptist General  
Convention of  
Texas.

(PHOTO/Brianna  
McLane/Baylor)

Hatfield, co-chair of the Future Focus Committee, presented a progress report from the strategic planning committee created in response to a motion at last year’s annual meeting in Amarillo. The committee

determined three key priorities for the state convention, he noted—missions and evangelism, Christian education and meeting human needs.

Co-chair Andy Pittman, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lufkin, characterized the committee’s task as helping to “move the convention into the 21st century.”

The committee has recognized the convention’s future is shaped by a “perfect storm” of factors, Pittman reported.

External factors include the decline of denominational loyalty, the passing of the World War II generation that has provided the financial base for Texas Baptist church giving, the national economic crisis and loss of investment income, he said.



Messengers register at the 2008 Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Fort Worth. The annual meeting drew 1,891 registered messengers from 550 churches—the lowest number since the 1949 meeting in El Paso. (PHOTO/Eric Guel)

Internal factors include a 10-year decline in Cooperative Program giving, a reduced budget for 2009, loss of trust and decreased participation in denominational life.

On behalf of the committee, Pittman introduced a motion that the articles of incorporation and constitution be amended to change the organization's name from "Baptist General Convention of Texas" to "Texas Baptist Convention."

The committee on convention business recommended that the proposed name change be referred to the BGCT Executive Board for further study and deliberation. Hatfield spoke in favor of the referral.

"We believe that every Texas Baptist deserves the time to consider the decision that for some may be easy, logical and simple and for others may be complex," Hatfield said.

In response to a question by David Cook from First Baptist Church in Devine, Hatfield said the Executive Board would research the legal implications and projected costs for the name change as part of their consideration of the motion.

Messengers approved a \$45,755,295 budget for 2009—about 8 percent less than the one approved at the previous annual meeting and down slightly from the current adjusted budget.

Of the total, Texas Baptist Cooperative Program giving will need to provide more than \$40.8 million, with the balance expected from investment earnings and other revenue sources.

One year ago, messengers to the annual meeting approved a \$50.1 million budget for 2008. But after the first quarter of this year, the convention faced a serious budget shortfall. Staff implemented cutbacks, and the budget was adjusted to \$46,186,665.

Messengers to the annual meeting also approved a recommendation that the adopted budget continue to be divided 79 percent for the BGCT and 21 percent to worldwide causes as directed by churches.

For churches that select the BGCT worldwide initiatives giving option, that area will include two additional global missions programs—intercultural international missions and Texas Baptist Men international ministries—along with continuing support for River Ministry/Mexico missions, the WorldconneX missions network, Texas Partnerships and the Baptist World Alliance.



BGCT President Joy Fenner calls for a show of ballots by messengers to the annual meeting. (BGCT PHOTO)

The initiatives are expanded to include four Texas Baptist missions initiatives—the Texas Fellowship of Cowboy Churches, Baptist University of the Americas, the Hispanic Education Task Force and Texas Hope 2010. Total projected revenue for BGCT worldwide initiatives is \$1.6 million.

In other business, messengers:

-Gave initial approval to a constitutional change that would provide the potential for increased representation at the annual meeting by small churches that give generously to the BGCT. Constitutional amendments require approval at two consecutive annual meetings.

Currently, the constitution says each church is entitled to two messengers for up to 100 members, plus two additional messengers for the first \$250 given to the BGCT budget and one additional messenger for each additional 100 members and each \$1,000 given, up to a maximum 25 messengers.

The amendment states that if a church's giving surpasses its membership, it would be entitled to one additional messenger for each \$2,000 given, up to six additional messengers. The maximum number of messengers per church would remain at 25.

-Approved a motion by Charles Whiteside, a member of First Baptist Church in Kilgore, asking the Executive Board and BGCT staff to research new ways to assist churches with fewer than 50 in attendance.

“I just feel there is a need there to be addressed,” he said. “I think it would strengthen our convention if we strengthened those churches.”

-Approved revised special agreements between the BGCT and two related institutions—Buckner International and Hillcrest Health System/Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center.

One agreement changes the percentage of Buckner trustees directly elected by the BGCT from 33 percent to 25 percent. It also stipulates that 75 percent of the trustees elected by Buckner be Baptists, as opposed to the current requirement that the board be 100 percent Baptist.

The other special agreement with Hillcrest provides for BGCT representation on a newly configured governing board created by the memorandum of understanding between Hillcrest and Scott & White Hospital in Temple.

Under terms of the proposal, Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center will be managed by a board of trustees, with half the board elected by Scott & White and half by Hillcrest Health System. The BGCT will directly elect 25 percent of the Hillcrest Health System board, and a majority of the board members will belong to BGCT-affiliated churches.

Terms of the agreement specify Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center and Hillcrest Health System will be operated “within the Christian-oriented aims and ideals of Baptists, including those contained within the Baptist Faith & Message statement of 1963.”

-Gave final approval to a constitutional amendment that clarifies the authority of messengers to the annual meeting to direct the BGCT

Executive Board and the board's responsibility to follow those directions.

The amendment, approved on first reading at last year's annual meeting, states: "The Executive Board shall have charge and control, except when otherwise direction by the convention, of all the work of the convention, including missions, education and beneficence, in the interim between its sessions."

-Passed seven resolutions, including statements encouraging Texas Baptist churches to support adult education, oppose gambling, pray for national and state elected leaders, and support churches and individuals that are continuing to rebuild in the aftermath of hurricanes Dolly, Gustav and Ike.