

# Texas Baptists endorse first chaplain to Native Americans

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Texas Baptists have endorsed Joe Donnell as the first Baptist General Convention of Texas tribal chaplain, with responsibility to serve the indigenous people of North America.

“Joe has been serving his people in a ministry capacity for a number of years, but at our recent conference, he expressed a desire to be affiliated with Texas Baptists,” said Bobby Smith, director of chaplaincy for the BGCT.

“An endorsement by the BGCT will be beneficial to Joe, but even more beneficial to us as we launch an initiative to win the First Nation to Christ,” Smith said. “Don Lacy, one of our endorsed African-American chaplains, called Joe the Martin Luther King of Native Americans, which is in itself a wonderful endorsement.”

Earlier this year, Smith and chaplains Will Bearden and Georgia Risenhoover journeyed to South Dakota to train 26 Native Americans in crisis resiliency, suicide prevention and Hands on Ministry. Three of those Native Americans attended the recent chaplain conference.

Donnell described the spiritual poverty that exists on many reservations as “dire.” He plans to start the first of what he prays will be many Native American BGCT-affiliated churches in the Dakotas, the first of which is being sponsored by The Church on Thistle Ridge in Granbury.

“Our goal is to train Native Americans to do ministry on reservations that will bring people into a right relationship with Christ,” Smith said. “This will involve establishing churches such as the one being sponsored by The

Church on Thistle Ridge. We have taken a step in the right direction, but we need a stampede of Texas Baptists to accomplish what God expects of us in ministering to America’s First Nation.”

Donnell, executive director and founder of Warriors Circle and a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate tribe, said Georgia Risenhoover, a sixth-generation descendent of Chief War Eagle, was instrumental in his introduction to Texas Baptists..



“Our connection with Texas Baptists came through Georgia,” he said. “The week prior to Easter this year, seven Native Americans, including me, were guests of The Church on Thistle Ridge in Granbury. We were introduced to leadership in other churches there as well, along with school administrators and some of the leadership of the BGCT in Dallas.

“We left knowing that these people had a genuine concern for the spiritual lives of Native Americans, and that if anyone could help us reach people on the reservations with the word of God it would be Texas Baptists. So, although I live in South Dakota, I’m now a Texas Baptist.”

Texas Baptists want to develop indigenous leaders within the Native American community, Smith said.

“Joe will be introducing us to people who will be trained to spread the word of God across reservations throughout the United States and Canada” he said. “The initial role of Texas Baptists will be to train Native Americans to minister to Native Americans, which will involve having our trainees plant churches on reservations and having them provide leadership for those churches.”

Risenhoover also will be available to speak to BGCT-affiliated churches and groups that want more insight into physical and spiritual needs on reservations and how they can help, Smith said.

“I know this,” he said. “When Americans see a need, especially Christians, they want to help. And one of the best ways to help is to support the ministries of those whom Native Americans trust. God could have called any group of people to the task of winning America’s First Nation to Christ, but I believe he called Texas Baptists for a reason. I believe he called us because we’re listening to what he says, which is why we have been chosen to impact a special people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”