

# Texas Baptists to explore ministerial residency program

November 15, 2022

WACO—Texas Baptists will explore the creation of a residency program that would enable young ministers to work alongside and learn from experienced ministers.

Scotty Swingler, associate pastor to students at Sugar Land Baptist Church near Houston, introduced the motion at the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Waco as a representative of the Gen Z/Millennial Task Force. His motion to create a task force to consider the development of a residency program for young ministers passed without opposition.

The [Gen Z/Millennial Task Force](#), created in response to a motion at the 2021 annual meeting in Galveston, had recommended Texas Baptists “commission a task force to study the viability of a BGCT pastoral residency program that helps emerging adults grow under seasoned pastors in both rural and urban settings.”

Swingler’s motion called for the chair of the BGCT Executive Board to “appoint a task force to explore the creation of a residency program whereby young ministers are mentored and trained by established ministers.”

His motion stipulated the task force have a \$10,000 budget to cover its expenses.

“The task force will present their recommendations in a timely manner to the new executive director, executive board and the messengers of the convention no later than the 2024 annual meeting in Waco,” the motion stated.

## Address the need for ‘on-ramps’

In speaking to the motion during the Nov. 15 business session, Swingler said one of the recurring themes in discussions of the Gen Z/Millennial Task Force was “a lack of on-ramps for young ministers to serve in Texas Baptist churches.”

On a personal note, Swingler said he might not be serving a Texas Baptist church today if BGCT Executive Director David Hardage—who will retire at the end of next month—had not sought him out after a Friends of Truett Seminary dinner in 2017. Hardage “invited me to invest in Texas Baptist life,” Swingler recalled.

“Dr. Hardage was my on-ramp to being a Texas Baptist pastor, but we can’t rely on our next executive director to personally invite every young pastor into Texas Baptist life,” he said.

## Dealing with several problems



Scotty Swingler identified several problems—some on

the part of young ministers and others experienced by many congregations—a residency program potentially could solve. (Photo / Robert Rogers / Baylor University)

Swingler identified several problems—some on the part of young ministers and others experienced by many congregations—a residency program potentially could solve.

He pointed to seminary graduates who end up serving outside of Texas Baptist life because they “cannot find a ministry role in a Texas Baptist church,” he said. Some move to congregations out of state, and others end up in “Methodist or nondenominational churches, because those are the spaces where their spiritual gifts are affirmed, developed and utilized.”

Swingler said he and others on the task force “lament the sheer weight of talent and giftedness that Texas Baptist churches lose each year because young Texas Baptist university and seminary graduates just don’t know how to find a home here in our convention.”

At the same time, many Texas Baptist churches struggle to fill ministry roles with well-qualified individuals, he added.

“Rural churches are disproportionately affected by this, as they often don’t have the financial or networking resources to identify and hire rising ministers,” Swingler said.

Many rural and small-membership churches struggle to grow because they cannot afford more than one—or at the most two—full-time ministers, he added.

# Sponsor learning environments

“What if Texas Baptists helped fund residencies across our state, in churches large and small, urban and rural, putting aspiring pastors—men and women alike—in full-time ministerial roles where they can develop and use their gifts to serve a church without worrying about whether they can afford rent, and without the church worrying whether they can afford another pastor?” he asked messengers to the annual meeting.

“Suddenly, after two years in a Texas Baptist residency, that seminary graduate is now an experienced youth minister or worship leader, and Texas Baptist congregations represented here today would love to call a young, accomplished Texas Baptist resident to come serve as their next associate pastor.”

Swingler pointed out some large churches already have residency programs in place, and Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary also has launched a residency program.

“The efficacy and blessing of residency programs is evident. Let’s do it at a statewide level,” he urged.

“The [Gen Z/Millennial] Task Force feels we can keep more young pastors connected to our convention and better resource our churches, if we’ll sponsor these sorts of learning environments. And give it time, we’ll have a host of young, trained, innovative ministers in Texas Baptist churches across our state.”