

WMU Pursue Conference asks: ‘Who is at your table?’

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WACO—The Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas Pursue Conference kept the Great Commission focus that has been at the heart of the organization since its beginning, while setting the stage for coming shifts.

“Who is at your table?” Texas WMU leaders asked. Table leaders then led dinner attendees to answer a series of questions about the literal table where guests were seated and to spur reflection on living missionally beyond the conference.



J. Merritt Johnston and Jackie Faughn at WMU of Texas Pursue Conference. (Photo/Calli Keener)

J. Merritt Johnston, a native Texan and University of Mary-Hardin Baylor graduate who serves as Baptist World Alliance Women executive director, was interviewed by Texas WMU President Jackie Faughn to help acquaint

attendees with BWA.

Merritt said BWA started in 1905 to network Baptists and impact the world for Christ. There are 51 million global Baptists in the Baptist World Alliance, 253 member bodies representing 130 countries and continents, and 176,000 Baptist churches around the world, she noted.

“It’s a big family that you’re part of” Johnston said. “And God has been moving in our Baptist family. We’ve grown 29 percent in the last 10 years, primarily in the global south.”

BWA Women has five ministry areas, Johnston said: strengthening worship, fellowship and unity; leading mission and evangelism; responding through aid, relief and community development; defending religious freedom, human rights and justice; and advancing theological reflection and transformational leadership.

Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer has been happening for almost 75 years, where Baptist women around the world pray for their communities, and they also “are praying for you” Johnston said.

“Who is at your table?” Johnston echoed the question. “My friend, the world is at your table, and you don’t have to go on an airplane to get there. ... On behalf of your global Baptist family, thank you for making a place for the world at your table.”

The signage is clear

Tamiko Jones, executive director-treasurer of WMU of Texas, followed Johnston saying: “The signage is very clear. God is calling us to make disciples.”

“We are certainly to be disciple makers,” Jones said, while acknowledging her way of being a disciple maker may, stylistically, look different than the

next person's way.

"But it is urgent as believers to take every opportunity to show love and then share the gospel."

Jones said God is calling, and "I pray you're obedient and bold to be disciple-makers."

Pursue God, she urged. And pursue relationships with others, because God's people are to make disciples for Christ, she said.



Exhibition Hall, WMU of Texas Pursue Conference.
(Photo/Heather Davis)

Julio Guarneri, executive director of Texas Baptists, told the conference, Texas Baptists are about two things: Loving God and sharing his love with others.

"We understand that sometimes going to make disciples of all nations means crossing the ocean, but we also understand sometimes in means crossing the street," Guarneri said.

In the past dozen years, Texas has added 9 million people to its total population, he noted adding, “I don’t think we’ve added 9 million people to our churches.”

Texas is changing, he said. Hispanics are now the largest demographic, followed by Anglos and African Americans. In Texas, 162 languages are spoken, and Texas Baptist churches offer services in 80 languages each week, he noted.

“The nations have come to us,” Guarneri said. “So, we have a great responsibility. Texas remains today a mission field and a mission force.”

“We’re so thankful for our relationship with WMU. You pray, you give, but you also do,” he said.

Getting down to business

Faith Howard was introduced as a National Acteens Panelist, and Rebecca Johnson was announced as the Eula May Henderson Memorial Scholarship recipient.

Texas WMU board members and staff leadership last spring to strategically plan to make sure WMU of Texas is moving forward to meet both the commandment and the commission that has been their description since 1880, both Jones and Faughn said.

Quoting, at length, a passage about a similar time of change on the horizon from *Lengthening Legacy*, a book about WMU’s history, Tamiko Jones made the case: “We have the courage to shift today because of the boldness that came before us.”

Faughn elaborated on that idea, saying: “I want you to hold onto that word ‘shift’ today. ... I don’t want you to think of change,” because that word causes a strong negative response.

“However, for us to be able to reach the 30 million in our state with the gospel, as well as discipleship making, we’re going to need to do some shifting,” Faughn said.

Jones and Faughn presented the reimagined Texas WMU mission statement: “To empower God’s people to advance the gospel through missional discipleship,” contrasting it to the prior mission statement of “making disciples to make disciples.”

Then they shared a new vision statement: “To see every believer across every culture and community compelled to live missionally.”

“We want to focus on making missional disciples,” Faughn said.



Sisters Shirley Porto, BWA, and Joyce Porto, Missional Lifestyle Strategist for Multicultural WMU Texas, lead workshop on cultural intelligence. (Photo/Calli Keener)

“Missional” is defined as believers living daily as disciple-makers—“thinking about your being versus your doing. How we walk

alongside each other to share the gospel—lifestyle, relationship, discipleship,” Jones said.

God’s people are called to be disciple-makers every day, everywhere, Jones and Faughn stressed.

“If we don’t do some shifting, what’s going to happen to us as an organization and what’s going to happen to our state?” Faughn asked.

The new vision and mission statements will guide WMU of Texas as it moves forward and unfolds living missionally, Jones and Faughn agreed.

“I think as we move forward, you will see that our purpose has not changed,” Faughn said. “But how we move forward may look a little different.”

Officers were reelected: Jackie Evans Faughn as president, Brenda Bourgeois as vice president and Lynn Montgomery as recording secretary.

Faughn cited Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Jesus’ quote of these verses in Matthew as a charge to live missionally, making missional disciples, because “it’s not a one and done. It’s ongoing.”

Texas WMU is leading boldly toward “not just a shift in organization but a shift in mindset, behavior, obedience and pattern,” Faughn said.

Trevor and Kimberly Yoakum, International Mission Board missionaries in Togo, West Africa, who currently are stateside staying at Mary’s House—missionary housing WMU provides on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary—spoke about their ministry.

Vanessa Lerma, first-ever border missionary for WMU of Texas, said she’s been encouraged by wonderful, godly women who helped her grow, who’ve taken the time to ask questions, encourage rest and spend life just being there. Lerma asked WMU members to pray for her and several women she

is working with.