

Editorial: How do we decide what to publish?

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“Don’t you want to know what I think about spousal submission?”

“Well, *that’s* leading with your chin.”

That was how I tried to get some interesting conversation started in our group during an interfaith conclave I attended back in the early 2000s. We were given a handful of hot button issues to discuss, and rather than jumping in, my group spent the first couple of days avoiding the heat.

Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger of Beth-El Congregation in southwest Fort Worth was seated to my right. He was the one who used the boxing metaphor.

I was young. He was wiser. He may have been right. Perhaps I was leading with my chin. Even so, I didn’t get knocked out, and we went on to have great conversation.

For me to ask, “How do we decide what to publish,” may be like leading with my chin.

Well, here goes.

The Baptist Standard is charged with being Baptist

A couple of years ago, the Baptist Standard went through a rebranding process—because that’s what companies do these days. Rebranding is like the intentional interim process for churches. It helps companies think

through who and what they are so they can move forward more effectively. At least, that's one way to describe rebranding.

As part of the process, we sharpened our mission statement—another thing companies do these days. Our sharpened mission is to inform, inspire and challenge people to live like Jesus.

When we consider something for publication, we ask: Does a news story or opinion piece inform, inspire or challenge people to live like Jesus? If so, it passes the most general test for consideration.

Of course, the mission statement doesn't communicate everything about the Baptist Standard; so, there are other tests.

- Does a news story involve Baptists, in general? If so, we consider it.
- Does a story involve or have importance to Baptists in Texas? If so, we consider it.
- Does it involve the BGCT and Texas Baptists? An almost automatic "yes."

For opinion pieces, the same set of questions can be asked.

But like our mission statement, simply adding Baptist and Texas to the filters doesn't include everything there is to say about the Baptist Standard. What else factors into our consideration?

The Baptist Standard is charged with being fair

Does a news story convey the facts accurately? If so, we consider it. If not, we work to get the facts right.

Does an opinion piece represent positions fairly? If so, we consider it. If not, where is the unfairness, and can it be addressed?

With opinion content, are various viewpoints being represented? We strive to be balanced, to give voice to the breadth of opinion and theological conviction among Texas Baptists. Given that criteria, some voices in Baptist life in Texas are not represented in the Baptist Standard.

The Baptist Standard is charged with being true

Back in the interfaith group, a woman sitting to my left responded to my question about spousal submission. She was from the Disciples of Christ—or Christian Church—and she explained how Southern Baptists didn't seem to understand how news about them affected all other Christian groups. She said she had to answer for the SBC many times because people assumed Southern Baptists represent all Christians.

Part of being true is telling stories about Baptists—about ourselves—that we wish weren't true but are. Some of these stories are a record of controversy, things some would rather keep quiet, but silence often is not the truth we want to convey.

We ought to tell these uncomfortable stories ourselves—and do so truthfully—because it is better for Baptists to tell their own stories than to let someone else tell them in our place. This is not so we can control the narrative but so that we take proper responsibility for ourselves, which is part of living the gospel in a broken world.

The Baptist Standard is charged with being responsible

We are committed to historic Baptist principles and strive to publish in accordance with them.

We are committed to journalistic excellence and strive to improve our journalism through lifelong learning—which includes your feedback.

We are committed to the redemptive and reconciling work of Jesus Christ and strive to publish what points in the direction of that work—even if the way there includes discomfort.

If we have failed to inform, inspire or challenge you to live like Jesus, we need to know about it.

If we have failed to be fair—reporting the news accurately and publishing opinion considerately—we need to know about it.

If we have failed to convey the truth, we need to know about it.

I'm looking forward to some great conversations.

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