

EDITORIAL: Small, quiet, but maybe significant

November 14, 2008

The 2008 Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Fort Worth reminded me of hundreds of Texas towns—small and quiet, but significant just the same.

The 1,891 messengers who assembled in Fort Worth comprised the smallest convention gathering in 59 years. And they were amenable to just about every business item that came their way. Time after time, I wrote in my notes, “√ w/o d&d”—approved without debate and dissent. Still, we may look back on the 2008 meeting as a watershed moment for our BGCT. Issues to ponder:

- **Politics.** For the first time in two decades, Texas Baptists Committed did not endorse a slate of candidates. TBC was born at the height of the battle for the soul of the Southern Baptist Convention. Its goal has been to protect the state convention from falling under control of the fundamentalist leaders who took over the national convention.

Editor Marv Knox

For several years, many Texas Baptists said TBC should quit endorsing candidates, since the fundamentalists formed their own state convention and no longer grapple for control of ours. So, this year, presidential candidates Stephen Hatfield and David Lowrie faced off in an “open” election, neither endorsed by any group. (Full disclosure: Stephen Hatfield is my pastor and cherished friend.) Both of them are eminently qualified to lead the convention, and David Lowrie will be a tremendous president. He has championed the principle that the BGCT should be open to and accept all participating, supporting churches, no matter how they feel about

national conventions. His election signals this principle is true: We affirm the value of all churches that choose to cooperate with our state convention. We do not dictate their national affiliation, and they do not dictate ours.

- **Presence.** We lacked a lot here. Attendance was abysmal. Of course, external conditions contributed to the low turnout. Hurricane Ike inflicted a heavy toll on the Gulf Coast and Southeast Texas. And even though the price of gas has dropped, the economy still is in the tank, inhibiting some prospective messengers from traveling to the meeting. Also, many Texas Baptists just don't attend meetings anymore. Maybe it has to do with "postdenominationalism" and a tendency to put a priority on other relationships. Possibly it has to do with the busy pace of life today and the difficulty of carving out time to attend meetings. Probably it has more to do with apathy, the BGCT's greatest challenge. Years of theo-political battles, followed by a church-starting financial scandal and misdirection took their toll. Now, individuals and churches expect the convention to prove its relevance and value before they commit time, involvement and resources.

- **Promise.** Although it reported only briefly, the Future Focus Committee offered a hint of the promise that can come from thinking creatively. The committee suggested changing the name of the BGCT to Texas Baptist Convention, and the proposal was referred to the Executive Board. I'm not sure that's the best name (we'll discuss it later), but the committee's willingness to think expansively is a great sign. We need to reinvent what it means to be Texas Baptists, and we can hope—and pray—the committee will wrestle with far more substantial issues, like how to engage all our passions and commitment, how to structure our common endeavors, and how to engage our culture. May the committee continue to embrace the kind of straightforwardness and creativity it demonstrated by offering to change our name.

- **People.** The best part of an annual meeting always is the people. Joy

Fenner did a great job as president; the first woman prez set a high bar for all who follow. Randel Everett was affable, uplifting and focused on Texas Hope 2010 in his first meeting as our executive director. Texas Baptists are great folks, and the ones who showed up seemed to enjoy each other and had a fine time.