

# Editorial: Together is the strength of the BGCT

February 22, 2023

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is a “together” place.

You already may have formed an opinion and response to what I mean based on the scare quotes around “together.” Whatever your opinion may be already, hear me out, because “together” is—outside of Jesus Christ—the strength of the BGCT.

## Together financially

If you’ve been around Texas Baptists any length of time, you likely have heard some version of, “We can do more together.” Somewhere close by that statement is a reference to the Cooperative Program.

For those unfamiliar with the Cooperative Program, the following is a summary. In the first quarter of the 20th century, [the SBC needed funds](#)—badly. The spirit of sacrificial cooperation on display among Americans during World War I led Southern Baptists in 1919 to launch the 75 Million Campaign to raise \$75 million.

[Texas Baptists L.R. Scarborough, George W. Truett and J.B. Gambrell](#)—one of my predecessors as editor of the *Baptist Standard*—helped lead the 75 Million Campaign. To fund this campaign, Southern Baptists adopted the Cooperative Program in 1925.

Despite a rocky start, the Cooperative Program eventually enabled the SBC in a relatively short time to grow into the powerhouse it became by the end of the 20th century. Pooling the financial resources of tens of thousands of

churches provided for the sending of thousands of missionaries around the world and the training of many more thousands of ministers through six seminaries.

State conventions followed the national convention's lead and established their own Cooperative Programs. Today with the help of its [Cooperative Program](#), the BGCT funds [a host of ministries](#) throughout Texas, some with a global reach.

## **How financial togetherness works**

The Cooperative Program works like your church's budget. When you give a tithe or offering—or both—every penny you give is applied to your church's general operating budget, unless you designate it for something specific, such as a youth fundraiser, a missions agency or a capital campaign.

If your church is Baptist, its budget may include a line item for your local Baptist association, a state Baptist convention like the BGCT and a national Baptist convention like the SBC. Some of the money you give to your church's general operating budget is passed on to those entities along with some of the money given by everyone else in your church.

In the BGCT's case, churches all over the state of Texas send this pooled money to the BGCT's state office to fund its general operating budget. Visit the Cooperative Program webpage linked above to see how that money is spent.

The annual budget approved by BGCT messengers at their annual meeting calls for 79 percent of Cooperative Program gifts to go to the BGCT adopted budget and 21 percent to worldwide missions causes. Each church decides where it wants to direct that 21 percent, such as the Southern Baptist Convention or BGCT worldwide missions endeavors.

This is—in a four-paragraph nutshell—the Cooperative Program. And it’s a strength of the BGCT.

## **Together in spirit**

But the BGCT’s togetherness isn’t just financial. The churches making up the BGCT also are together in spirit. As an example, consider the issue of women in ministry. Some of you just rolled your eyes and muttered, “Oh, brother”—or something like that.

I mention women in ministry because it’s a divisive issue among some Baptists right now. It’s not a divisive issue within the BGCT, however, even though BGCT churches differ over the place and role of women in ministry.

To date, BGCT churches have said we will work together in mission and ministry, even though we differ on the issue of women in ministry. BGCT churches differ over other issues, as well—such as whether to have elders, for example—yet have a common spirit encapsulated by a desire to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ and to care for others as Jesus did.

This common spirit is a strength of the BGCT. In fact, being together in spirit is a greater strength than being together financially. And being together in the Spirit is the greatest strength of any group of Christians. May the BGCT be together in the Spirit above all else.

## **A ‘together’ challenge**

Last year, the BGCT received just under \$27 million in Cooperative Program funds—as reported by Texas Baptists’ Treasurer and CFO Ward Hayes during the BGCT Executive Board meeting Feb. 21.

Just like with your church, not everyone who claims membership gives financially. But what if everyone able to give financially did? And what if

everyone who could give more than they do gave more?

And imagine if that was prompted by the Spirit and maintained by a spirit of shared cause. What might be possible then?

First, let us open ourselves to the Spirit of God and do what the Spirit tells us to do. And not just today, but every day going forward. I have no illusions doing so is or will be easy. You shouldn't either.

Second, let us lean into a shared spirit of mission that is greater and more important than our differences over secondary and tertiary theological issues. These issues have not separated BGCT churches thus far; they should not be allowed to separate BGCT churches going forward.

Third, from this position of strength that joins hands across theological difference, let us welcome others like us who are or will be looking to join hands with Baptists like the BGCT.

Fourth, let us match our financial giving and investment with our spirit. The churches and ministries of the BGCT are accomplishing astounding things in Jesus' name with current funding. What might all of us be able to do together with more?

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