

# Editorial: Pulling together: Some BGCT annual meeting highlights

November 17, 2021

Like most who attended the 2021 Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Galveston, I wondered what it would be like. How many people would show up? How many would wear masks? What would it be like at the booths in the exhibit hall?

It turns out, in-person attendance was good, exceedingly few wore masks, and the booths were a great experience. But the annual meeting was much more than that.

Here are some of the highlights of this year's annual meeting.

## Pulling together

The No. 1 highlight of the convention each year is reconnecting with friends. I started to mitigate that assertion by preceding it with "perhaps," but there's no "perhaps" about it. After at least a year away, being together in person *this* year wasn't just anticipated, it was healing.

Many came by our booth to express their appreciation and thanks for what we do. I am certain other exhibitors had the same experience and thoroughly enjoyed time and conversation with supporters. We want to say, "Thank you," in return. We are glad to serve the Lord with you.

I challenge us to do the same thing for the pastors and ministers of our churches. Let's let them know we appreciate them and what they do as spiritual leaders. It's OK for others to see us show gratitude for ministers; it

helps to create a culture of appreciation within our churches.

Several efforts are underway to care for and strengthen struggling Texas Baptist ministers and churches. Having once been the pastor of a small and struggling Texas Baptist church, I celebrate these efforts. It will take all of us to make them successful. Let's pull together.

## **Heavenly minded *and* earthly good**

One of the highlights of each annual meeting is getting to see together in one place the good Texas Baptists are doing. And much good is happening among and through Texas Baptists.

Christian women across Texas empower other women through Christian Women's Job Corps job skills training and Bible studies. The work isn't exactly glamorous, but glamor is fleeting; life-change can last as long as eternity. Women's lives are being changed through CWJC, as are men's lives through CMJC, ministries of WMU of Texas.

Men and women working with Texas Baptist Men are representing Jesus Christ in the aftermath of natural disasters. This is hard and dirty work; long, tiring and risky work—so much like the life of Jesus. But it is fruitful work, also so much like Jesus' life.

Baptist Student Ministries on more than 120 college and university campuses throughout Texas are as close to where the rubber meets the road as anyone. Students involved in BSMs are swimming upstream, advancing God's kingdom in places many don't want to or can't go, and it's making a difference.

Texas Baptists also carry the gospel—the good news of Jesus—to hospitals, child care, public policy, and public and private education all over Texas. There really is no place where Texas Baptists—individuals from Baptist

churches big and small—won't take the gospel.

I challenge us to be adventurous and to partner with at least one Texas Baptist ministry. Their success is our success, and vice versa. But more than that, God's kingdom requires all the kingdom's citizens to be involved somewhere, somehow.

That line "You're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good" can't be applied without exception to Texas Baptists. To make sure it doesn't apply at all, let's pull together.

## **A work in progress**

That Texas Baptists do much good does not mean Texas Baptists are perfect. Texas Baptists are and always will be a work in progress. That has been true from the first Baptists in Texas—which Leon McBeth notes in his sesquicentennial history of Texas Baptists may have been as early as 1812—and it is true still today more than 200 years later. It will be true until Jesus returns.

The adoption of a motion and a resolution regarding the need to reach Millennial and Generation Z people points to one area Texas Baptists are a work in progress. Gratefully, Texas Baptists appear to want to make progress connecting with younger generations.

During the Intercultural Ministries banquet, Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, shared some captivating statistics. While Baptists in Europe and North America are in single-digit declines, Baptists in the rest of the world are experiencing growth in the double-digits. The African continent is an exception. Baptists there are growing at a rate well over 100 percent.

I took in these numbers while looking around a room full of Baptists from

all over the world. Among Texas Baptists are numerous nationalities and ethnicities who know what it means to be at a cultural, political and financial disadvantage, who know what persecution is. Despite those challenges, the Christian church in many of their countries of origin is growing like wildfire.

I challenge us to “sit at the feet” of—to learn from and be led by—brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world. Let us partner with them, but not as experts in missions, church growth, theology and the gospel. On that score, the emperor has no clothes. Let us partner with our brothers and sisters from around the world—quite a few of whom are right here in Texas—because it’s time we pull together.

## **A personal highlight**

My father-in-law, Glenn Ward, started teaching me almost 25 years ago what it looks like when Texas Baptists pull together. I went with him to a BGCT annual meeting around the turn of the century. He knew just about everyone there.

We spent our time at booth after booth in the exhibit hall, talking with all the people he knew and had worked with over decades in the pastorate. Of course, we ate apples and cheese, and we did so at every annual meeting we attended together afterward. We stood in walkways and sat at dinner tables talking with his friends and ministry colleagues. It was a lot to take in, and it was fun.

Over the years, I have heard countless stories of mission work he has engaged in with Texas Baptists from Brazil to New Mexico, Mexico and Moldova. And I haven’t just heard stories; I’ve seen him at work. We even worked alongside each other during two construction trips in Juarez.

Glenn served on the Executive Board, and when the convention offices

were housed at 333 N. Washington Ave. in Dallas, I was a guest of his during an Executive Board meeting. He also took my wife and me to the building to meet with Sam Pearis, Lindsay Cofield, Cecil Deadman and Bill Tinsley when she and I became Mission Service Corps missionaries in 2002.

Glenn has been pulling together with Texas Baptists since at least the 1960s when he attended Hardin-Simmons University. He pulls with Texas Baptists still as the director of missions for Paluxy Baptist Association.

The BGCT annual meeting is one of Glenn's happy places, but he wasn't able to attend this year since he is undergoing cancer treatment. He told me to tell everyone who knows him he said, "Hello." But I don't know everyone who knows him. So, I wrote, "Glenn says, 'Hi!'" on both sides of my name badge. It generated a lot of conversation, and I got to see a different side of Texas Baptists pulling together.

As I checked out of the hotel Tuesday morning, I was wearing my name badge, and the two women working the front desk wanted to know, "Who's Glenn?" I got to tell them. One thing about Glenn: He loves people. Another thing about Glenn: He loves Jesus.

I told them why Glenn wasn't there. In response, they told me to tell him, "Hi!" So, I told him, "Peggy and Sparkle say, 'Hi!'" He loved that.

When we pull together, we're also pulling for each other.

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