

Editorial: What to expect from the 2023 BGCT annual meeting

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This year's Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting is a Family Gathering, a fairly recent modification of the annual meeting format that occurs every five years. This year's Family Gathering takes place in McAllen July 16-18.

Since Family Gatherings are held during the summer—as opposed to the regular autumn schedule—the first thing people expect is heat and sun. KRGV 5 News in the Rio Grande Valley forecasted a balmy 102°F for Sunday and 101°F for Monday and Tuesday, plus the heat index. Heat and sun we will get.

We can expect some singing, some preaching, some meeting and some voting. We also can expect to walk up and down the rows of exhibits looking for freebies and Minnesota-Wisconsin apples and cheese. In this way, Family Gatherings are no different than other BGCT annual meetings.

We expect to see old friends—whether they really are old or we've just known them a long time. For many, this is the highlight of each BGCT annual meeting—"a family reunion," we call it.

So far, I've answered a different question than the headline asks. The things listed above answer the question of what to expect *during* the 2023 BGCT annual meeting. But if this meeting—and any other like it—is to be worth its salt, the more important question is what to expect *from* it.

Will we come from the meeting more Christlike?

Important discussions will take place during the annual meeting. We may even vote on some of them. When those discussions and votes are over, the matters that gave rise to them will not be finished. They will continue after we return home.

When we return home, will we have been formed in any way during the annual meeting for engaging those issues in a more Christlike way? I realize that's a lot to ask of such a compressed and busy time.

If we are not so formed, then for us the annual meeting really is just business, not a time and place where the Holy Spirit—who is never compressed and busy—holds sway. For followers of Christ, such meetings are never “just business.” They always are times of formation. We should expect to come away from the 2023 annual meeting looking and living more like Christ.

Being open now to the voice and leading of the Holy Spirit before, during and after the annual meeting—wherever the Holy Spirit calls us and leads us—is a necessary posture toward that end.

Will our families come from the meeting stronger?

The intent of Family Gatherings is to bring families together in at least two senses. In one sense, the intent is for families—spouses, parents, children—to attend the gathering together.

For those families able to attend together, will they return from the annual meeting better for it? Will their relationships be sweeter, their love deeper,

their commitment stronger? We should expect from the Family Gathering that they will.

To increase the likelihood of this happening, families planning to attend together need to commit now to have shared experiences during the meeting. They should commit to find within the busyness and business of the meeting life-giving things that will deepen their joy in Christ in ways transferable to the daily grind after the meeting.

In a second sense of gathering family, the Family Gathering is intended to bring together the churches of the BGCT, African American Fellowship and Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas—whose annual meetings normally are separate from each other—and the international and intercultural churches affiliated with the BGCT.

It's not enough that we will be in the same building at the same time. Will we share meals together, sit together, talk together? Will we listen to one another? Will we come together on equal footing to worship our one Lord and to discuss ministry matters with equal concern?

I realize all the above are seemingly easy-to-answer "yes" or "no" questions. But there's a hook in every "yes" and "no," and that hook is barbed. The kingdom of God is contained in every one of those questions, and it's not going to let go of those who claim citizenship in it.

Will we return home from this Family Gathering more unified as one body—Christ's body? Will we be more united in advancing God's kingdom together, for all people? We should expect that from this Family Gathering.

We can ensure such an outcome by preparing ourselves in the same ways I've already mentioned.

Will we come from the meeting changed?

We should expect to return home from the annual meeting changed, and not just in any way, but changed to be verifiably more like Christ. What good is a Baptist meeting if we don't come away more like Christ?

The way we discuss challenging issues will reveal how much like Christ we are. We don't even have to get to the point of agreement to demonstrate whether we are or are not like Christ.

The spirit of our families will reveal whether Christ is at the center of them. Our families don't have to be perfect for people to see the love of Christ at work within them.

How we do life together with people unlike us—especially after we aren't at the Family Gathering anymore—will reveal the fruit of the Spirit in us. Not every fruit on the tree has to be photogenic for others to see we really are not of this world.

We also don't have to check off all three of the above all at this one meeting. We can leave that up to the One who changes us, but we ought to prepare to be made more like Christ in some way while we are together.

We may think we're just going to attend another BGCT annual meeting. We need to expect more than that.

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