

# **IN FOCUS: Thanks for God's indescribable gift**

December 9, 2010

Advent is a time to remind us of the many thanksgivings that are ours. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). It continues to be incomprehensible that God would empty himself by becoming a man and humble himself by death on the cross that we might have life.

It is impossible to see the baby in a manger without seeing the shadow of the cross. God's love must be beyond comprehension and our sins must be horrible for Jesus to pay such a price for us.

This Advent season is a time of transition for Sheila and me. I have accepted the invitation to become pastor of First Baptist Church in Midland. I reflect back on these last few years as executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas with genuine gratitude. I never imagined I would have the opportunity to serve in this capacity and even now thank God and Texas Baptists for this trust.

I have had the opportunity to meet hundreds of our pastors and visit in churches throughout Texas. I love the diversity of the regions of Texas, the multiethnic people groups, the uniqueness of the cowboy churches. I have worshipped in rural and urban churches, large and small, magnificent buildings and temporary facilities. I have met godly men and women, rich and poor, wise and simple, old and young, ordained and nonordained.

I have been on the campuses of our universities, children's homes and hospitals. I have observed the servant spirit of house parents and chaplains offering hope to the hurting. I have read material written by Baptist

theologians and practitioners, evidenced policy strategies aimed to protect the marginalized, joined prayer walks along the border, handed out water and food to the needy, shared gospel CDs door-to-door, joined conversations with young ministers in training. I am overwhelmed by the family of Texas Baptists serving in Christ's name throughout our state and beyond.

Some emphasize this is a post-denominational world. Others criticize Texas Baptists for being too fundamentalist or too liberal, too legalistic or too permissive. Yet I have observed Texas Baptists deployed in disaster relief, Baptist university students receiving their diplomas, neighborhoods being fed and tens of thousands in worship, I thank God I have had the opportunity to serve such a family as this.

Obviously this is a time of transition. We must discover new paradigms for missions and ministry. Our focus should be on collaboration instead of control. Yet even with our many shortcomings, I thank God for his grace working through the Texas Baptist family.

Sheila and I are excited about a new opportunity to serve through a church already committed to mission partnership through the BGCT. We also will look back on this ministry experience with deep gratitude.

We join with you and Christ followers around the world giving thanks to God for his indescribable gift!

*Randel Everett is executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board.*