

IN FOCUS: You may qualify for a free night at BGCT

August 21, 2009

The BGCT annual meeting will convene in Houston Nov. 16-17. We are offering special rates at the Hyatt Regency Houston for certain groups of pastors and staff.

Randel Everett

Texas Baptists are a diverse group of churches, representing numerous people groups. However, attendance at the convention does not always reflect this diversity. Over 40 percent of our BGCT churches are predominantly non-Anglo. About 20 percent are Hispanic, 15 percent are African-American, 3 percent are Asian and 2 percent represent language groups other than English. Cowboy churches are not a separate ethnic group (although they do speak western heritage) but they represent the fastest-growing segment of Texas Baptists' congregations.

Our rich diversity is not as obvious when we come together as a fellowship of churches at our annual meeting. Our programs, committees, officers, trustees and staff do not yet reflect this mosaic. How can we share the hope of Christ with a state composed of hundreds of language groups when decisions are made primarily by representatives from a small segment of our population?

In addition to the ethnic diversity, most of our churches are comparatively smaller congregations, many of which are led by bivocational pastors. It is costly for these pastors to miss work, travel to Houston and stay in expensive downtown hotels in order to attend. While we are considering other meeting options and less-expensive venues for the future, it is impossible to change from the sites already under contract.

This year, the BGCT is offering to split the cost at the Hyatt Regency Houston for pastors and staff from our Hispanic, African-American, western heritage and affinity churches, plus congregations that average less than 100 in worship. The rack rate for this hotel is \$329 per night. The BGCT price is \$135. We will pay half of \$135 for up to two nights for the first 200 from each of these groups if you register as a messenger prior to Oct. 9. The nights available are Nov. 15-17. This is an arrangement only with the Hyatt Regency Houston and does not include other costs, such as taxes, parking, etc.

Scholarships also are available for messengers who are age 35 and under, and activities are planned before and after the meeting for this age group, including a concert Monday night with the Robbie Seay Band.

The theme for our annual meeting is Texas Hope 2010-Get Involved. We will celebrate lives being changed and plan strategies for reaching others with the gospel of Christ before Resurrection Sunday 2010. We need representation from our entire constituency as we pray for God to convict and empower us to be his people in a world desperate for God's hope.

Forms for the discounted hotel rates are available through Charlie Singleton, Rolando Rodriguez, Charles Higgs, Patty Lane, Cecil Deadman and through the BGCT communications office. Information about the hotel and annual meeting schedule is available at www.bgct.org/annualmeeting. Come to the celebration, and have a night out on us.

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