

# **Bill Arnold: Stewarding resources to change the world**

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Since 1984, Bill Arnold has served as the one and only president of the [Texas Baptist Missions Foundation](#). From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on leading the Foundation. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## **Background**

### **Where else have you worked, and what were your positions?**

When you've been in one position for 34 years, that doesn't allow much time to be anywhere else!

When I finished seminary, I went to Willow Meadows Church in Houston as the minister of youth. From there, I came to the Dallas Baptist Association as the director of the lay ministries division and then to the BGCT as the youth consultant in the Sunday School division, and then to the Missions Foundation.

### **Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Hernando, Mississippi, which was a county seat town of 1,000 in northwest Mississippi. When I was 13, we moved 25 miles north to Memphis, Tennessee. For a young teenager, it was like moving to another country!

## **How did you come to faith in Christ?**

I was fortunate that our family was always a part of a church. In Hernando, we attended the only Baptist church in town. This was back in the time when, if the Methodist church had a revival, the other churches canceled their services, and everybody went to the revival. It was a great town for a young boy.

I do not remember when I did not know that Jesus loved me and wanted to be my Savior. The summer when I was nine, our brave pastor, Charles Skutt, took a busload (by himself!) of RAs to camp at Kittywake on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

During the last night's invitation, I decided that it was time for me to publically say what I had already decided about Jesus being my Savior. That was good news to everybody who hoped it would change my nine-year-old behavior, but I had to wait six months to be baptized because the church baptistry had a leak in it. When I was baptized, I stepped out of the baptistry into a washtub to drip-dry.

## **Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?**

I graduated from Central High School in Memphis in a building that was built in 1909 (and is still being used). I have a Bachelor of Science in economics from Mississippi College and a Master of Arts in education from Southwestern Seminary. I am also a certified financial planner and a licensed real estate broker.

## **Ministry life**

### **Why do you feel called to your particular vocation?**

I felt a call to ministry when I was a senior in high school. When we moved

to Memphis, we joined First Baptist Church. Soon after that, Bob Dixon came to the church as the youth minister, and, soon after that, the church built an activities building. Under Bob's leadership, I became involved in all the aspects of the youth program. Clearly, God used those activities and my involvement to show me the plan he had for me.

As I look back on my vocational journey, it's interesting to see how God was leading. The job I have now did not exist when I was in college or seminary, but my choice to major in economics in college helped perfectly prepare me for working with the Foundation, and my work with laymen at the Dallas Baptist Association connected me with the men who helped start the Foundation.

**Please tell us about your BGCT institution—the breadth and nature of its work, including its mission, measures of scope, etc.**

The Texas Baptist Missions Foundation grew out of the Mission Texas emphasis that began in 1984. This was a five-year emphasis to begin 2,000 new churches in Texas before 1990.

While the BGCT had always provided some financial help to new churches, we knew that there would not be enough money from the cooperative program and the Mary Hill Davis offering to fund the 20 to 30 million dollars that it would take to start 2,000 new churches. So, under Dr. Bill Pinson's leadership and with days and days of volunteer help from Fred Roach, a layman, we began a fundraising effort to provide the funds that the new churches would need.

It was a pioneering effort—no other state convention had ever tried an effort like this. By the time Mission Texas was over, the Foundation had raised \$22,000,000 and BGCT churches had started more than 2,000 new churches.

After Mission Texas ended, we broadened the scope of the Foundation to include raising funds for other areas of Texas Baptist life. Last year, we raised almost \$5,000,000 and supported 85 different ministries in Texas and around the world.

## **What do you like best about leading your institution? Why?**

The best thing about leading the Foundation is that I get to work with a terrific staff team and great donors.

I have always been fortunate to have a great staff: Jerry Carlisle and Steve Massey are vice presidents, John Halton is a senior consultant, Leslie Snyder is the donor relations coordinator and Rita Griffith is my administrative assistant. The Lord has really put together a great team who are committed to the Lord and to the work of the Foundation.

With regard to our donors, I like to say that we get to work with God's choicest people. They are certainly the happiest! I've never worked with a sad donor, and I don't think I ever will.

The mission statement says that "To the glory of God, we work with people who want to use their resources to change the world." I get to be a part of a staff and a large group of donors who are all about accomplishing that mission.

## **What aspect(s) of your institution and/or its mission do you wish more people understood?**

I wish more people understood the scope of the Foundation's work and how we can be an effective channel to help them support whatever aspect of missions they feel led to help.

I also want people to understand that their estates are a great source of

support for missions. Leaving even a tithe of one's estate to missions can make a difference for generations to come.

Finally, I wish people understood that the money they give to missions never stops giving. For example, people who gave to the Foundation in 1985 helped start churches that are still going today—meeting every week, reaching lost people and helping them to grow in Christ.

## **How has your institution and its mission changed since you began your career?**

When we started the Foundation, there was no model; we were working from a blank sheet of paper. That has its pluses and minuses, but it makes every day a new day. I was fortunate to have great help from Dr. Charlie McLaughlin, Dr. Bill Pinson, Fred Roach and others.

For a number of years, the staff was just me and an assistant, so there was nobody to blame for the mistakes but me. As we have broadened the number of ministries we assist and increased the number of donors that have helped us support those ministries, we have been able to add staff to keep up with the challenges of acknowledging and reporting to donors and of making sure that the gifts are spent in the way the donor intended.

Last year, we received 14,981 gifts from 4,784 donors. Our intent every year is to give away most of the money that we raise. We aren't trying to build a corpus for the Foundation; every year we give away what we raise in accordance with the donor's direction or guidance from the Foundation Council for undesignated money.

## **How do you expect your institution and/or its mission to change in the next 10 to 20 years?**

The mission of the Foundation will not change, and there will never be quite enough money to meet all the needs that we see. Raising money to

support those needs will always be a challenge as people's motivation for giving changes and as they see needs from a different perspective. The challenge is to stay ahead of those changes and to present needs in a way that will encourage people to support missions.

## **Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your institution.**

1. The proliferation of people and entities asking for support. Donors tell me that they are bombarded by mail, phone and in person by people asking them for money (as am I).
2. The challenge of effectively telling the mission story of Texas in a way that is understandable and challenging to donors.
3. The task of getting people to include missions in their estate plan.

## **What one aspect of your job gives you the greatest joy or fulfillment?**

Getting to work with a great staff and incredible donors. The spiritual depth of the people with whom I work, both donors and staff, is a challenge to me every day. Our donors truly understand the joy of giving, and it's a great privilege for me to be a part of that.

Another I've come to realize is that, when you look at the funds the Foundation has raised and the ministries that those funds have helped, it's a wonderful legacy. I'm happy to have been a part of that.

## **About Baptists**

### **What are the key issues facing Baptists?**

We have forgotten what it means to be Baptist, and we take for granted all that we have accomplished because we worked together as Baptists. The

institutions that Baptists have started, the plan for mission support through the cooperation program and our focus on the priorities of missions and evangelism have allowed Baptists to influence the world for Christ. There are those who would distract us from those priorities and make us lose our focus on the challenges that the world brings our way.

## **About Bill**

### **Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?**

I've been fortunate that God has let my life cross the lives of some wonderful people. First of all, my mother and dad were wonderful examples of what a Christian should be. I could pick any day of their lives and say to myself "be like that."

Bob Dixon has had a great influence on my life, beginning as a teenager and continuing today. The opportunity to work with a layman like Fred Roach, who lived his faith in the business world, was influential, as was the wonderful opportunity to learn from Bill Pinson, Charles McLaughlin, and Jim Semple.

I hope I have been as good a mentor to others as these folks were to me.

### **What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?**

The first would be Exodus 33:11 that says, "God talked to Moses, as one friend talks to another." That is my goal to know God that well. The other is two verses that I just hold onto really tightly—Romans 8:38-39, a reminder that nothing can separate me from God's love.

### **Who is your favorite Bible character, other than Jesus?**

## **Why?**

Paul and Moses—they were both great fundraisers!

## **Name something about you that would surprise people who know you well.**

Until recently, I was a member of an offshore sailboat racing team.

## **If you could get one “do over” in your career, what would it be, and why?**

That, in my younger days, I would have asked for wisdom more earnestly than I did.

## **Write and answer a question you wish we had asked.**

### ***Tell us about your family.***

My wife, Margaret, is the lead counselor at the middle school in Highland Park ISD. We have a daughter, Meredith Underwood, who lives in McKinney. She and her husband, Todd, have two seniors in high school, one of whom is headed for the University of Arkansas next year, the other to Collin College, and an eighth grader. Our son, Jonathan, and his wife, Beth, live in Dallas and have two boys—seven and four.