

Larry Venable: ‘Purposefully and decidedly multiethnic and multicultural’

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Larry Venable has been pastor of [Freeman Heights Baptist Church](#) in Garland since 1983. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated minister to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?

- Pastor, Arlington Heights Baptist Church, Fort Worth
- Student minister, Arlington Heights Baptist Church, Fort Worth
- Student minister, First Baptist Church, Rogers
- Summer missionary in East Texas for resort missions of the Baptist General Convention of Texas
- Student minister, Dellview Baptist Church, San Antonio

Where did you grow up?

San Antonio

How did you come to faith in Christ?

Through the blessings of a godly father and mother, who took me, taught me, and lived the life of Christ in daily life.

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

- Bachelor of Arts, Howard Payne University, 1975
- Master of Divinity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978

About ministry life

Why do you feel called into ministry?

Grace. My calling is as sure as my salvation experience.

What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

People. I love seeing people grow in knowing and serving our Lord. I love seeing the “light go on” when they realize God is at work in them and has something for them to do.

What one aspect of ministry gives you the greatest joy?

Seeing multiple ethnicities come together in worship and service of our Lord.

What one aspect of ministry would you like to change?

Me, and the tendency to take on more than I should instead of handing it off to others who are more gifted for the task than I am.

How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?

I think the increased emphasis on equipping and mentoring disciples to grow and serve. I’ve always believed this, but I am convinced it may be the most important thing I do.

How do you expect ministry to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

The ministry must become purposefully and decidedly multiethnic and multicultural. I am convinced ministry is going to become more and more urban.

Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your ministry.

1. Unfortunately, I do not see many churches prepared to take the plunge into reaching and accepting different ethnicities.
2. Sunday school is dying on the vine and needs to be overhauled, and off-campus community groups need to be established.
3. Church governance. Too many churches are handcuffed by business meetings and just a few people running things.

What do you wish more laypeople knew about ministry or, specifically, your ministry?

That there always is opportunity to serve. You may not be gifted to sing in a choir or to teach a class, but there are many ways available through our ministry for you to serve.

About Baptists

Why are you Baptist?

I was raised in a Baptist home and a Baptist church. I deeply appreciate the emphasis on missions and new churches, and I will remain a Baptist, unless the false teachings that have crept into other denominations come to us or the name becomes a hindrance to the gospel.

What are the key issues facing Baptists—denominationally and/or congregationally?

No. 1 is waking up the urban church and placing value on the community church. To come to the point where size is not the issue, but effectiveness is. Baptists don't help this by having only people of large churches speak at every convention and meeting.

The future of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention is bleak. Younger pastors are not into the convention. The infighting has turned them away, and arguments over things like the "Rebel Flag" and dumb resolutions instead of working with all people to transform our world with the gospel is driving them away.

Also, too often, the idea that the church exists for the convention instead of the convention existing for the church is killing the relationship between the church and the conventions.

What would you change about the Baptist denomination—state, nation or local?

I would change from convention meetings to networks in strategic areas and including different denominations. I would do away with resolutions; they simply have made us look foolish to the world. I would place priority for church help and starts in urban areas.

About Larry

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

Early in ministry, Ray McVoy. This retired pastor took me under his wings and encouraged me and gave value to the ministry and preaching of God's

word.

Then my professors at Howard Payne: Robert Campbell and James Shields were instrumental, not only in teaching, but investing time in my development as a minister.

At Southwestern Seminary, Al Fasol was fabulous in teaching me about preaching.

In my ministry now, Mike Satterfield has been instrumental in encouraging, advising, praying and helping.

My personal friend, Terry Cosby—now with the Lord—was a sounding board for all complaints and doubts, never failing to say what I needed to hear.

What did you learn on the job you wish you learned in seminary?

How to develop a multiethnic church and the people skills that requires. I also wish I had learned more about small group ministry in the community.

What is the impact of ministry on your family?

It is extremely positive. This church never put the burden on my children to be the “pastor’s kids,” and now I have a son leading worship in a new church start, two sons who are pastors, and a daughter serving as an educator.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.

J.I. Packer. Any of his books. He puts theology in a fresh and relevant way.

Erwin McManus, *The Last Arrow* and *The Barbarian Way*. You cannot read

these without catching a conviction to do *all* for our Lord. Erwin holds nothing back.

Bob Roberts, *Bold as Love*. If there is anyone doing a better job of reaching Muslims and Jews, I would love to hear from them.

Mark DeYmaz, *Ethnic Blends*. This book absolutely is necessary for anyone wanting to do multiethnic ministry.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10. In November 2009, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's. God graciously has continued to use me and allow me to serve in his strength made perfect in my weakness.

Who is your favorite person in the Bible, other than Jesus? Why?

Peter always was rising out of the ashes and always was faithful to the call, learning hard lessons along the way, but never giving up.

If you could get one "do over" in ministry, what would it be, and why?

I would have initiated a multiethnic ministry much sooner, and I would have prepared the church better for it.