

Robby Partain: The church is the front lines of Great Commission work

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Since 2010, Robby Partain has served as the executive director of the [Bluebonnet Baptist Association](#) in the New Braunfels and San Marcos region. 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 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?

- Adult minister, Lazybrook Baptist Church, Houston, Texas
- Church planter, Portland, Oregon
- Interim church planting strategist, Interstate Baptist Association, Portland, Oregon
- Missions and church planting strategist, and then director of missions, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention
- Associate executive director, Bluebonnet Baptist Association

Where did you grow up?

Houston, Texas

How did you come to faith in Christ?

Through the ministry of Garden Oaks Baptist Church in Houston and a faithful mother who took me to church and pointed me to the Lord.

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

- Texas A&M University, Bachelor of Business Administration
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Master of Divinity
- Phoenix Seminary, Doctor of Ministry

Ministry/Profession

Why do you feel called to your particular vocation?

I love the ministry of assisting churches and church leaders.

Please tell us about your association—where it's located, the key focus of its work and ministry, etc.

Bluebonnet Baptist Association covers the area between Austin and San Antonio and east and west of I-35. Most BBA churches are in Comal, Hays, Guadalupe and Caldwell counties, with a few also in Bastrop, Blanco, Bexar and Wilson counties.

Our mission is *assisting churches*. We do that through three ministry priorities: assisting churches in starting new churches, assisting churches in church health and revitalization and assisting churches in equipping church leaders.

What do you like best about leading your association?

Why?

I enjoy the close, direct connection to the churches and church leaders. I also enjoy the clarity we have with our mission statement, *assisting churches*. It keeps us focused on what we're supposed to do and allows us to say no to things we're not supposed to do.

And, of course, I love the fellowship of ministry leaders in our association. We have a wonderful group of men and women who give leadership in BBA churches. It's a privilege to partner with them.

What aspect(s) of associational ministry and/or its mission do you wish more people understood?

That we are here to assist churches, not go around or do ministry in lieu of the local church. The church is the front lines; we're the close support team for their Great Commission work.

How has your association and its mission changed since you began your career?

We've remained consistent in our mission statement and ministry priorities. In terms of emphasis, we are putting more effort into equipping church leaders in practical ministry skills and in helping them and their spouses have a support system within the association.

One of my goals is to increase the tenure of senior pastors in BBA, believing that a healthy pastor who stays put will promote church health over the long run. We're also beginning to put more effort into the area of stewardship equipping, both in terms of present stewardship and in leaving a legacy beyond our earthly lifetime, should the Lord tarry.

How do you expect your association and/or its mission

to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

I don't expect the mission to change. Because of the growth of the Austin-San Antonio region, I expect that BBA churches will become more diverse, more nontraditional, and more focused on the unreached local mission field. The ways we assist churches will need to reflect these changes. How to do that is an ongoing learning project for me as associational leader.

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

- Population growth and cultural change in the core of the association.
- Finding called and equipped church planters.
- Transitioning leadership in churches from older to younger generations, both in terms of lay and pastoral leadership.

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

Encouraging a church leader to hang in there—and then seeing that happen!

About Baptists

What are the key issues—opportunities and/or challenges—facing Baptist churches?

The same as with other evangelical churches: reaching and discipling younger generations; dealing with being marginalized by the broader culture; remaining biblically faithful and withstanding the cultural pressures, particularly in areas of gender identity and sexuality; the decline in per capita giving and the need to make disciples who are biblical

stewards; learning to do ministry in a diverse and rapidly changing local mission field.

What are the key issues facing Baptists as a people or denomination?

Same as the above.

About Robby

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

Dr. J. K. Minton has been my primary mentor in ministry. He was my pastor, my associational DOM, my partner in ministry, my predecessor here at Bluebonnet Baptist Association and now, in his “retirement,” a staff member with Bluebonnet Association focusing on church health and coaching church leaders. He has always been my dear friend and advocate. He has coached me through the good, the bad and the ugly of ministry.

I have been blessed with other wonderful influences in my life. They are too numerous to name for fear of leaving someone out.

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

C. S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity” and other works. Lewis opened my eyes to the broader stream of Christianity and the sound reasons undergirding the faith.

Steven Covey, “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” Transformed the way I view time and how I use it.

Richard O’Connor, “Undoing Depression.” Helped me understand a

personal struggle and gave me practical tools to deal with it.

Henry Blackaby and Claude King, “Experiencing God.” Formative in my early adulthood.

Historians David McCullough, Steven Ambrose and William Manchester. These three have given me a broad historical perspective and an appreciation for great, though very flawed, leaders.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

Psalm 131 is one I go back to again and again. It reminds me to get over myself, be content in the Lord and look to the future with confidence because of Who I am with.

Who is your favorite Bible character, other than Jesus? Why?

Barnabas, the “son of encouragement.” He was one of the indispensable men of the first-generation church. Leading by example in the Jerusalem church, vouching for Paul, bridging the Jew/Gentile divide in Antioch and elsewhere, taking the gospel to new places, giving John Mark a break—I really like the faithfulness and the personality of Barnabas.

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

I have no idea. I’m pretty boring.

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

There are lots of mistakes I would unmake with the benefit of hindsight. But then again, each one of those mistakes taught me something and grew me. So I’ll pass on the do-overs and just be grateful that God has protected

me in my incompetence.

Write and answer a question you wish we had asked.

Here are two. Take your pick.

So, how much more fun is grandparenting than parenting?

Considerable! Parenting is work. Grandparenting is pure fun.

How did a guy like you wind up with such an amazing wife?

Undeserved favor from God. Susan is an amazing wife, mother, grandmother and partner in ministry. I can't imagine this journey without "Big Mama" by my side.