

**October 2008**

*Newsletter of Texas Baptists Committed and Mainstream Baptists*

# 2008 Election of BGCT Officers

by *David R. Currie, Executive Director*

First, I want to thank this year's BGCT officers — Joy Fenner, Mike Massar, and Jeff Raines — for their outstanding service to our convention this year.

Second, I'd like to address TBC's decision to not formally endorse any candidates for BGCT office this year. In recent years, some people have expressed concern about TBC continuing its policy of endorsing candidates for BGCT office 10 years after the Fundamentalists formed their own state convention. There were good reasons for TBC to endorse candidates, and I stand behind our decision to do so all these years. We have endorsed candidates because we believed it was important to promote strong leadership for the BGCT and because we needed to show our deep respect and appreciation for our many ethnic congregations, as well as the key leadership roles that women fill in our churches.

Most of the concern has been expressed by persons who, while supporting the BGCT, have remained equally supportive of the SBC. To be blunt and very honest (after 21 years, I doubt that you would expect any less from me), such a dual commitment doesn't make sense to me. But it is reality among quite a few people and churches.

It is also reality that most BGCT churches continue to give to the SBC. We must respect the freedom of people and churches to give as they feel led.

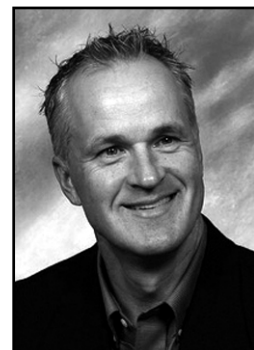
This year, our TBC Board decided not to publicly endorse candidates for BGCT office, in the belief that it *may* finally be time to stop that practice. As I wrote earlier this year, however, our Board and I continue to stay informed about candidates, their positions, and their track records. If we find that any candidate is a Fundamentalist and/or does not fully support the BGCT, we will let you know without delay. You will always be able to trust TBC and David Currie to keep you informed of any Fundamentalist threat to our convention.

## BGCT OFFICER CANDIDATES – AS OF MID-OCTOBER

### PRESIDENT

There are two announced candidates for president of the BGCT.

**Stephen Hatfield**, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lewisville, will be nominated for president of the BGCT. I have known Stephen for many years, as he held TBC rallies in his church during the heat of the battle in the 1990s. Stephen attended our TBC Convocation this year. His sister, Gracie Hilton, published our first TBC newsletters 20 years ago.



*Stephen Hatfield*

Stephen has served as chair of the BGCT Administrative Committee and now chairs the BGCT Vision Committee, which has the assignment of setting our convention's agenda for the next 10 years.

He has a great legacy as the son of Lawson Hatfield, long-time Sunday School director for the Arkansas state convention.

**David Lowrie** is the pastor of First Baptist Church, Canyon. He ran against Joy Fenner last year in Amarillo. David and I serve together on the Howard Payne University Board, and we have talked several times during the past year. His church has several missionaries serving with the SBC on the mission field



*David Lowrie*

*See Candidates, page 2...*

***BGCT Executive Director Randel Everett will be the featured speaker at the annual Texas Baptists Committed Breakfast at the BGCT Annual Meeting.***

***The Breakfast will be held at the Fort Worth Convention Center at 7 a.m., Tuesday, November 11, 2008.***

To make reservations, email [carolscott@txbc.org](mailto:carolscott@txbc.org) or call the TBC office at 325-659-4102. Please fill out the form provided on page 15, and send it to TBC with your check. If you are also sending a donation, please write separate checks for your Breakfast reservation and your donation.



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and, thus, has remained supportive of the SBC.

David attended our TBC Convocation this year. It's my impression that David was encouraged to find that TBC supporters are conservative Texas Baptists who love freedom, Jesus, and the Bible.

He has a great legacy as the son of D. L. Lowrie, a former BGCT president who served as pastor of First Baptist, Lubbock, and succeeded my uncle, Charlie McLaughlin, as State Missions director.

I honestly believe that either of these men will be good for the BGCT. Having said that, I also want to request that the next president — whether Stephen or David — continue the recent practice of serving only one term. The BGCT is a large convention, and we are at our best when we share leadership as widely as possible.

### **FIRST VICE PRESIDENT**

At this time, I know of only one candidate for first vice president.

**Carolyn Strickland** is a member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. She will be nominated by her pastor, George Mason. Carolyn is a great choice and a great friend. She has had a wonderful ministry for many years, developing and running preschools for Hispanic children in Dallas, helping to prepare them for first grade and teaching them English.



**Carolyn Strickland**

Carolyn is the widow of my closest friend, Phil Strickland, long-time director of the BGCT Christian Life Commission. Phil was a brilliant and courageous man. All of you know how much I admired him as well as loved him. But a big part of his great success was Carolyn, who grounded him and supported him.

### **SECOND VICE PRESIDENT**

I also know of only one candidate for second vice president.

**Bobby Broyles** is pastor of First Baptist Church, Ballinger. Bobby and I went to Howard Payne together. My sister, Carolyn, plays the organ in his church, and my brother-in-law, Danny, is a deacon there.

Bobby reminds me of two pastors I respect greatly, the late (and very great) Billy Ray Parmer (Valley Mills) and J. B. Bitner (Big Lake). These two men invested themselves in their communities and, basically, served as pastor of the entire town. Bobby does the same thing. The Ballinger church has come alive like it used to be, when Ferris Akins (another rural pastor role model) was pastor 25 years ago. They are growing, building, and baptizing like a healthy church should.



**Bobby Broyles**

### **ANY MORE CANDIDATES?**

If we hear of any other candidates surfacing before the convention, we will provide that information through our Web site and other resources, including any thoughts I have about those candidates.

Please come to Fort Worth on November 10-11, and take seriously the responsibility that we all have to protect the freedom of the BGCT. Come and celebrate our freedom as Texas Baptists.

## **Kerry Horn Named TBC Associate Executive Director**

In August, Kerry L. Horn assumed the position of associate executive director of Texas Baptists Committed. Kerry most recently served over 11 years as pastor of First Baptist Church, Covington, Texas.



**Kerry Horn**

Kerry was a member of Truett Seminary's inaugural graduating class of 1997. He has served on the Truett Seminary Board of Advisors, as well as the Co-operative Baptist Fellowship National Coordinating Council. He has also served as moderator of the Co-operative Baptist Fellowship of Texas.

Kerry is an ordained deacon. He and his wife, Laura, live in Cleburne. They have two children — a daughter, Leslie, and a son, Emory.

Kerry has hit the ground running as TBC's associate executive director, traveling through much of East Texas to meet pastors and learn how TBC can work with and support the churches in those areas. In the days to come, another focus for Kerry will be working with TBC's new Pastor Peer Group program.

David Currie and the Texas Baptists Committed Board of Directors welcome Kerry Horn and look forward to his work with us.

## **New Baptist Covenant Preparing for Regional Meetings**

*Volunteers in various parts of the country are organizing regional meetings of the New Baptist Covenant, according to Jimmy Allen, a member of the Steering Committee. To date, gatherings have been scheduled for 2009 in Birmingham, Alabama, on January 30-31; Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on April 23-25; and Norman, Oklahoma, on August 7-9.*

*President Jimmy Carter has committed to attend the three regional meetings. Steering committees are currently working on program details, and additional information will be released as it becomes available.*

*Additional regional meetings are being considered for the Midwest and Northeast.*

# Steve Vernon Great Choice for BGCT Associate Executive Director

by Marv Knox, *Baptist Standard*

Posted on September 30, 2008, to his FaithWorks blog on the Baptist Standard Web site ([www.baptiststandard.com](http://www.baptiststandard.com))

Steve Vernon is a great pick for associate executive director of the BGCT Executive Board.

The BGCT Executive Board has selected Steve Vernon to become the board's associate executive director, serving alongside new Executive Director Randel Everett. This is a great move.

Vernon has been pastor of First Baptist Church in Levelland for 17 years. He's also been president and vice president of the BGCT. He'll do a terrific job in his new role.



Steve Vernon

## Balanced roles

In nominating Vernon, Everett drew chuckles from the board after noting he sensed divine direction to choose Vernon because the West Texas pastor casually noted he "likes committee work." Funny line. But it's also a great insight into the Executive Board's top two staff leaders.

Everett is an idea guy. He started his new job last spring with a bang by announcing Texas Hope 2010, a monumental plan to share the gospel with every Texan and to make sure no Texan goes hungry by Easter 2010. That's Everett's forte—helping Texas Baptists think big and dream God-sized visions for our life and work together.

Everett also is a people person. He's off to a fast start in his young tenure, traveling the state and meeting Texas Baptists. Speaking in our churches. Drinking coffee with laypeople and ministers alike. Visiting our institutions. Scoping ministry needs and possibilities. These are exactly the kinds of tasks he needs to be doing.

But you can't provide specific, day-to-day leadership of a large and complex organization and simultaneously travel all over the state. And it's hard to carve out the time to dream and ruminate on potential and possibilities if you're bogged down in minutiae of staff moves, budgets, and "committee work."

So a leader like Everett needs someone to lead out in details, to secure implementation of programs, to sweat the details. Everett wisely knows this, and he made a terrific decision to select Vernon. As he described their working relationship, "I'll focus on strategy, and Steve will focus on tactics."

## True-blue Texas Baptist

Vernon knows Texas Baptists inside-out. After a year as vice president and a year as president of the convention, he's seen the BGCT firsthand and up-close. More than perhaps any convention president and/or vice president, he made an effort to attend all kinds of meetings and meet with the vast variety of Texas Baptist constituencies.

He's been to all these places and knows Texas Baptists and the convention so well for a simple reason: He loves our convention, which means he loves our people—laity, pastors and ministry staff, institutional employees, directors of missions, Executive Board staff. Everybody. He's intentionally inclusive, warm and loving.

## Great for the job

Vernon is thoughtful, creative, energetic, faithful, kind, compassionate, and full of integrity. He's the real deal, and he will raise the bar for strengthening the convention—not only the work of the Executive Board, but also the churches, associations, and institutions.

Oh, and another thing. He's funny. His sense of humor will serve him—and all Texas Baptists who will work alongside him—well in days of transition, challenge, and opportunity.

Thank God for Everett's good decision, and pray for Steve and Donna Vernon as they move from Levelland and their beloved First Baptist Church to Dallas.

## TEXAS BAPTISTS COMMITTED

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Kerry L. Horn, Associate Executive  
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## ***A Rancher's Rumblings***

**By  
David R. Currie  
Executive Director**

**July 29, 2008**

### ***Religious Liberty: A Freedom That Belongs to All Americans***

I hang onto the hope that we are making progress in our thinking as Baptists and yes, as Americans, but reality sometimes bursts my bubble.

This week, the *San Angelo Standard Times*, my local paper, published a letter to the editor that sent shivers up my spine.

It told of the "horror" experienced by the writer upon hearing a political candidate state, "We are no longer a Christian nation" and acknowledge the diversity of faiths held by Americans today.

The writer went on to encourage everyone to show their support for "America as a Christian Nation" by contacting various TV network news organizations. Then she ended her letter by appealing to the readers to use their votes to demonstrate "that we are, indeed, still a Christian nation."

No, the "shivers up my spine" weren't the same as the writer's "horror." What gave me shivers was that her "horror" was based on a total misunderstanding of the founding and history of America.

America is not now and never has been a Christian nation, and all of us should get down on our knees every night to thank God that it isn't. America was founded as a totally secular nation to protect the religious freedom of all of its citizens. Remember — we Baptists were oppressed in other countries when our numbers were small. So is it right for us, now that we are in a country that has large numbers of Christians, to oppress others? What happened to the Golden Rule?

Regardless of what you hear, most wars are not about oil - they are mostly about religion. In most cases, one religious group tries to use political and military power to impose its religion on another country or group of people. Thanks to the First Amendment, America has never fought a war over religion. In America, all religions and beliefs enjoy total and complete religious liberty. Thank God.

How did religious liberty in America come about? Well, before the First Amendment was adopted, several colonies made a habit of putting our Baptist forefathers in jail - just for preaching the Gospel or, in some cases, specifically for preaching believer's baptism. Baptist leaders - for a start, go look up the name of John Leland - persuaded James Madison to insist on a constitutional provision securing religious liberty. So the First Amendment was born, containing 16 precious words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The founders of this nation understood that religious persecu-

tion ALWAYS resulted from the joining of government and religion. Let me illustrate with a few quotes from Thomas Jefferson:

"History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance of which their civil as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purposes." — *Thomas Jefferson to Alexander von Humboldt, 1813*

"In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own." — *Thomas Jefferson to Horatio G. Spafford, 1814*

"Our civil rights have no dependence upon our religious opinions more than our opinions in physics or geometry." — *Thomas Jefferson: Statute for Religious Freedom, 1779*

I have said this over and over through the years but feel compelled to say it again. America is a nation that has many Christians precisely because America has NOT made Christianity an official government-sponsored and government-sanctioned religion. We are a free nation that has many Christians, but we are not now and have never been a "Christian nation."

I thank God for this freedom - we are free to worship a God who desires our devotion given freely, not coerced by the state. On the other hand, those who do not wish to worship God as we do are free to follow their beliefs as well. This freedom is given by God - thank God that we live in a country that acknowledges that God-given freedom. I wish every single nation in the world had this religious freedom. If they did, then our missionaries could freely share Jesus without fear of punishment by any government.

So I encourage you to thank God every day for this freedom - for you and for your neighbors. Then go out and exercise it by worshipping and praising Him - and sharing Jesus as you go.

**September 9, 2008**

### ***Everyone Matters***

I write this *Rumblings* on August 28th, the 45th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" address, presented on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington.

It was a remarkable speech. I consider Dr. King the most inspiring and effective speaker I have ever heard. That speech is framed and hangs on the wall of our TBC offices, along with a picture of Dr. King and a picture of the Lincoln Memorial.

What I hear Dr. King saying in that speech is that it is time for all Americans to acknowledge that everyone matters. This timeless passage summarizes that dream:

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Luke 15 shows Jesus presenting three parables - the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son. All three parables stress the same point: it is God's nature to care about everyone - with no exception. Everyone matters. In fact, you cannot become "unmatterable," no matter what you do. All three parables also show God's passion for restoring the broken and alienated to His fellowship.

Why do we Baptists send missionaries all over the world? Because everyone matters.

Why does the BGCT support hospitals, retirement centers, child care ministries, nine universities, and three seminaries? Because everyone matters.

Why does the BGCT continue to start churches in every area of the state - from the biggest city to the smallest, most sparsely populated, rural community? Because everyone matters.

One biographer has written that Dr. King never sought to lead a movement. Yet, in 1955 - after Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to obey a bus driver's order to give up her seat to a white passenger - Dr. King was chosen as the leader of the emerging movement to end racial discrimination and segregation. The rest is history.

The civil rights leaders based their movement on the Biblical truth that everyone matters, just as we send missionaries - and support Baptist colleges and universities, seminaries, hospitals, retirement centers, and child care ministries - because we believe that everyone matters. Yes, everyone matters to God, from birth to death, regardless of one's creed, color, poverty, wealth, or station in life.

In the past 45 years, Americans have made great progress toward achieving the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr. But there is still much to accomplish, and we will accomplish it only by agreeing that everyone matters. I hope, dream, and pray that Texas Baptists already know this truth and have shaped their ministries to reflect this truth.

*October 2, 2008*

### *The Danger of Politics in the Pulpit*

With the presidential election only about 5 weeks away - and early voting right around the corner in many areas, I urge all of you to make the effort to vote and to vote your principles and values. Every voter should be a "values voter."

And pastors should preach what the Bible has to say about values. And churches should seek to carry out Biblical values, as they understand them, in all of the work that they do. However, pastors and churches should not be in the business of advising you how to cast your vote.

This past weekend, something happened that was unconscionable. Encouraged by an organization called the Alliance Defense Fund, 33 pastors endorsed a presidential candidate from the pulpit in violation of federal law. Organizations that receive tax-exempt status are prohibited from engaging in partisan politics. That is the law, and it is a good law - both for the political process and for the church.

No, this does not restrict a preacher from speaking from the pulpit about what he or she believes the Bible says about issues and values. I have preached many sermons addressing what I believe to be biblical teachings on ethical issues. That is my right - my legal right - just as it is the right of every preacher in this country, and we should fight any attempt to restrict what a preacher can say from the pulpit regarding biblical teachings, even when they deal with issues that have political overtones.

But endorsing a political candidate from the pulpit is something I believe is horribly wrong and destructive, not just from a church-state perspective, but from a Kingdom-local church per-

spective.

It is said that, if you get two Baptists together in one room, you get three opinions. So it is the rare - perhaps even nonexistent - church whose members all support one political party or one candidate. That's a good thing. A healthy church is a church of unified mission but diverse opinions. I have friends in my home church who I know plan to vote differently than I do, and none of us would stand for it if our pastor were to endorse either candidate from the pulpit. Thank God we have a pastor who would never do such a thing.

Not all of San Angelo is so fortunate. One of our local San Angelo pastors was one of the 33 who followed the Alliance Defense Fund's strategy last Sunday.

But hear me again on this. Preaching on biblical ethical issues is appropriate. Good, prophetic preaching challenges Christians to think about what the Bible says and what it means in their day-to-day lives. That is good Baptist theology, encouraging persons to think for themselves and interpret the Scriptures for themselves.

But engaging in partisan politics, especially to the point of endorsing a political candidate, is wrong and destructive to God's Kingdom.

What is the next step? Will we rename our churches the First Democratic Baptist Church of Paint Rock or the Grace Republican Baptist Church of Dallas? That would be unthinkable - but no more unthinkable than what those 33 pastors did last Sunday.

This kind of partisan political preaching spreads from the pulpit to the pew and poisons relationships in the church body.

A person's decision to vote for either McCain or Obama is not the test of whether that person is a committed Christian who believes the Bible and loves Jesus. Strong Christians will and do vote differently, and that is normal and healthy.

No matter if you and your best friend disagree, it does not make either of you right or more spiritual than the other.

Whoever wins, all of us - as Christian citizens of this country - should pray for him as our president, realizing that either can accomplish much good - or much harm.

The Kingdom of God is bigger than America, American politics, and any political party or organization or individual. Yes, government policies and activities can help to carry out values that are biblical, both in America and around the world, but keep two things in mind - one, those policies and activities should represent all Americans, not just Christians; and two, God is not limited by government activity.

Practicing Christian citizenship is important and biblical, but we must always be humble, gracious, and respectful in sharing our human opinions. Always remember that none of us knows the mind of God perfectly. "For now we see through a glass, darkly." (*1 Corinthians 13:12*)

I serve on the Board of The Interfaith Alliance in Washington, D.C. I love this organization and what it stands for and works for in protecting religious liberty.

Its Web site, [www.interfaithalliance.org](http://www.interfaithalliance.org), has posted a pledge that it is asking members of the clergy to sign. It is a pledge that is based on principles that are faithful to the Bible, our Baptist heritage, and the U. S. Constitution. It includes a promise to

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## ***A Rancher's Rumblings***

*...continued from page 5*

refrain from endorsing political candidates “in or on behalf of our house of worship.” I encourage all ministers to read this pledge and sign it. To sign the pledge, go to [www.interfaithalliance.org/clergypledge](http://www.interfaithalliance.org/clergypledge). Here is the pledge:

### **I Pledge...**

\* To educate members of our congregation about how our faith relates to issues of the day.

\* To refrain from endorsing any candidate, either explicitly or implicitly, in or on behalf of our house of worship.

\* To prevent partisan speech from candidates or their surrogates, as well as the distribution of partisan materials, in our house of worship.

\* To resist using or soliciting the resources of our house of worship for the exclusive benefit of any candidate or party.

\* To respect candidates whose religious beliefs are different from my own, and stand against the use of religion to divide our communities.

\* To encourage members of our congregation to take an active role in civic life, including casting informed votes.

The Interfaith Alliance does work that is essential not only to protecting religious liberty but to encouraging dialogue among those of different faiths. Times of financial crisis are hard times for all, including nonprofit organizations such as TBC and The Interfaith Alliance. Please give what you can to support both TBC and The Interfaith Alliance. These groups are working on your behalf. We need your support.

Please vote November 4 as you feel led, and respect those who disagree with you. Just remember - the Kingdom of God is much, much bigger than a political election.

***October 14, 2008***

### ***Celebrate Our Texas Baptist Independence at the BGCT Annual Meeting***

The Annual Meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas will be held in Fort Worth, on November 10-11, 2008. I urge you to make an effort to attend.

In the 1980s and 1990s, many of you faithfully came to the convention every year to save the BGCT from Fundamentalist control. I am so grateful that you did that, and I assure you that our BGCT leadership - both then and ever since then - are grateful, too.

It is because of you that Texas Baptists are free. No one group controls Texas Baptist thought; no one controls our institutions and ministries; we are a free convention.

Therefore, I think we should consider the annual convention our annual Texas Baptist Independence Celebration and make a special effort to be there.

The wonderful teachers I knew at Southwestern Seminary all had their integrity and faith questioned; in fact, many of them were fired. My heroes from when I was a young minister were banished from leadership in Southern Baptist life. Tragically, most state conventions were not strong enough to resist the lies and unethical tactics practiced by Fundamentalists.

Today, Louisiana College and Baptist universities in many other states exist in a climate of fear and turmoil. Many other Baptist universities have struggled to free themselves from Fundamentalist control.

In Texas, we have worked hard to keep our institutions free from such threats, and—praise God—our institutions *are* free today.

This alone should be reason to come to the Annual Meeting every year—to celebrate our freedom and independence as free and faithful Texas Baptists.

But we also have tremendous ministries to celebrate: children's ministries that impact the world; retirement ministries that honor well-lived lives of service; border and hunger ministries that show our deep understanding of the full Gospel; and ethics-driven ministries that challenge us to live our faith, not just talk about it.

We are responding to God's leadership by starting Cowboy churches, ethnic churches, and house churches across Texas. Our student ministries are sources of witness and support to the students in our colleges and universities.

We should gather together each year to celebrate these institutions and ministries - and to rejoice in our freedom. It should be our Texas Baptist Independence Celebration, and I hope you will make a point to be there. I look forward to seeing you.

***August 12, 2008***

### ***Seeing God in a Life of Skunks, Diesel Baths, and Barn Apartments***

*The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. —Frederick Buechner*

Frederick Buechner is my favorite Christian author, because he is so human, so real, so much in touch with what it means to live life honestly. One of the most important things that a Christian can do to grow is read, and I highly recommend everything Buechner has written. If you'll Google “Frederick Buechner,” you will find numerous quotes from his writings. I urge you to do so.

Buechner is an ordained Presbyterian minister who never was a pastor but has written many books. Following are my favorites:

- \* *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Comedy, Tragedy and Fairy Tale*
- \* *The Sacred Journey*
- \* *Now and Then*
- \* *The Book of Bebb* (four novels featuring evangelist Leo Bebb)

Buechner often urges his readers to listen to their daily life and see what God is doing there. I try to do that, but I'm struggling lately.

One night this week, Loretta shut the garage door and went to bed without mentioning that she had shut the door all the way (we usually leave it up about a foot for cats and dog to get in and out). I opened the door the next morning and nearly gagged at the smell of skunk.

My scream woke up Loretta. She said, “I shut the door to keep



the skunk out that has been eating the cat's food." Well, as it turned out, she had in fact locked the skunk IN the garage. Unfortunately, I had let the dog out of the house at midnight, so he spent 7 hours locked in the garage with the skunk!!!

Amazingly, the dog avoided getting sprayed. However, Loretta's Yukon may smell of skunk for the rest of its life.

But that was just this week. Last week was interesting, too. One day last week, I went to fill up a 5-gallon diesel can, because I was paying Loretta's grandsons to spray mesquite on the ranch with diesel mixed with Remedy and Reclaim (and water).

Diesel tanks have a large spout, which doesn't fit in most plastic cans. Well, at least it sure didn't fit in this one. As I tried to get the diesel into the can, it pressured up and blew diesel all over me. My hair wound up dripping diesel, as did my clothes—and I had an appointment in 30 minutes. It was horrible!

So I went into the convenience store restroom to clean off as best I could. This restroom had a water faucet that you have to keep pushing to keep the water flow going. Well, I tried to wash up with one hand, while pushing the faucet with the other hand. Then, because there were no hand towels, I had to bend down and stick my face and hair under an air blower. Right then and there, I swore that, if I ever find whoever invented blowers to take the place of paper towels, I would give them a good, hard kick—in a loving Christian spirit, of course.

To further complicate life, we sold our house, which is a good thing. However, now we have to move, which is never fun. We are moving to an 800-square-foot apartment (in a barn I built) while our house is being finished. That's fine if you're young and newly married. But something tells me that it's not going to be a lot of fun at our age, especially when my wife keeps saying, "I can't believe you built only one bathroom."

So, umm, remembering Buechner's advice, I am listening to my life and trying to hear and experience God at all times. Well, to be honest, life feels pretty stupid at times. Where is God in skunks and diesel and barn apartments? And does He not have better things to do than worry about my silly experiences?

So where *is* God in my life?

God is with me every second of every single day, just as He is with every single person on the face of the earth. Missionaries do not carry God to places—they go and join with God, who is always there. They go and join in the things that God is trying to do there and with which He wants them to help.

God is with me when I'm stupid, brilliant, sad, and happy, just as He is with the person in a Sudan refugee camp who has no home. He cares for us equally and wants to share life with us.

Where is God? He is always trying to use every experience in life to help us love Him more and experience His love more, but He controls very little, if any, of our lives. At least that's what I think.

So what can I learn from a skunk, a diesel bath, and a barn apartment? I can remind myself how wonderful it is to be alive and to be "surprised with joy" at life's unexpected moments. And I can remind Loretta that she once said she loved me so much she'd live in a shack with me, and then go see whether we can have fun in a barn apartment for the next 6 months!!! And, umm, I

can remind myself that this is a great time to spend less time on the Internet and watching baseball, and instead spend my time just being with her and enjoying her presence. Pray for me.

*September 16, 2008*

### *Mother, Moving, Music, Matt, & Modern Technology*

#### *Mother*

I appreciate the many kind and thoughtful notes, calls, and email messages concerning Mother's serious fall during the spring and the two surgeries that followed, for the purpose of removing the blood that had built up in her brain. I want to update you on the remarkable recovery that she has made for someone who is 91 years old. Her mind is alert, and she can walk, though it's safer for her to use a walker. She even went to church with me on Sunday morning here in San Angelo.

She wanted badly to continue to live where she has for the past 48 years—in the home that my Currie grandparents built in 1935. But my sister and I felt that it would be too risky.

So, last week, Mother moved to Baptist Memorials in San Angelo, where she has a one-bedroom apartment and will continue to live alone, as she desires.

I continue to be deeply impressed by the ministries of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Randel Everett, BGCT executive director, spoke recently in San Angelo and talked about these ministries—specifically, about how Texas Baptist hospitals provide over \$1 million PER DAY in charitable medical care. He spoke of the hundreds of thousands of children helped by our children's ministries. He also highlighted the great work being carried out, on over 120 university campuses, through Baptist Student Ministries.

I have toured the retirement ministries in Amarillo and San Angelo and have been amazed to see what Texas Baptists do for persons who are in the twilight of their lives. Whatever my Mother needs from now until I preach her funeral, I am confident that Pat Crump and the staff at Baptist Memorials can and will provide with love, concern, and quality—all in the name and spirit of Christ. I find that tremendously comforting and feel deeply grateful and proud to be a Texas Baptist.

So, the next time you hear someone recommend that your church align with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC), please ask them to answer the following questions:

- \* For how many children does the SBTC provide care?
- \* For how many elderly people does the SBTC provide care?
- \* How much charitable health care do SBTC hospitals provide every day?
- \* To how many students does the SBTC minister on Texas Baptist university campuses?

To each of these questions, there is the same simple answer: NONE.

#### *Moving*

Mother isn't the only one who's moved recently. Loretta and I have just gotten moved into our barn apartment. And you know

*...continued on page 8*

## ***A Rancher's Rumblings***

*...continued from page 7*

what? I think I like it. I'm a barn sort of guy!!!

### ***Music***

Sticking with the "M" theme, let's move on to music. Loretta and I sneaked out to hear The Eagles in concert, and it was a genuinely spiritual experience for me. Yes, I know what some of you are thinking—God surely does work in mysterious ways. But I teared up when they sang *Desperado*, and I want this song played at my funeral.

### ***Matt***

Then there's Matt. Matt who, you say? Matt Cassel, that's who. This is a wonderful story. Matt Cassel started at quarterback Sunday for the New England Patriots. What is remarkable is that this was the first game he had started at quarterback since 1999, when he was a junior in high school. That's right! He never started a college game. In that time, he wound up on the bench behind two Heisman Trophy winners and a three-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback. Some guys might have given up, thinking they would never get a chance to play. But Matt Cassel never gave up, never stopped believing in himself, and now he's starting in the NFL for the defending AFC champions. What a tremendous lesson he's taught us about never giving up on your dream.

### ***Modern Technology***

Finally, a word about modern technology—which does not always seem very modern. On September 5, our email program crashed at the TBC office. All last week, I got no email at all—until Friday afternoon, when I got over a thousand email messages, most of which were junk email. Over the weekend, I got 551 more—again, all but about 15 were junk. Besides that, I lost all of the email messages I had received since the middle of February.

So, if you have emailed me in September and received no reply, please re-send it. I'm not ignoring you; your message is probably just lost in the middle of all that junk email. The bottom line is—I don't want to lose touch with all of you faithful friends and supporters. So please stay in touch. You're what keeps this ministry going, and I always love hearing from you.

As always, thanks for your support of TBC, your prayers for Mother, and, especially, your faithful support of the BGCT.

***September 23, 2008***

### ***Peace in a Time of Uncertainty***

This evening, I was reading a Web site that featured questions and answers about the current economic crisis in America.

One question was from a 31-year-old man who asked the expert whether this stock market crisis could be good for him in the long run, since he got to "buy cheap" into his 401(k). The expert replied that history would say "yes," but "the current financial mess is like nothing that's ever happened before."

Late this afternoon, a friend called and asked me what I think about the financial crisis. I told him that all I know is to have faith in America and trust God. What other choice do I have?

Friends, let's be honest. Most of you reading this did not live

through the Great Depression, and neither did I. We do not know much about financial chaos in America. We certainly have no idea what the future holds, and I write this column sitting in my barn apartment, 30 yards away from the construction site of my new home, wondering a little just how stupid it might be to build a new home in the midst of such a financial crisis.

I honestly believe that we average Americans have no idea how bad things really are. I do think that, if it were not real serious, the government wouldn't be stepping in so quickly to bail out the large financial institutions. And, to be honest, does anyone really know whether the Bush Administration's proposal will work? Even the Treasury secretary admits that he can't guarantee it will work. Some members of Congress are even urging their colleagues to take the time to consider alternative solutions, whereas others warn that we can't afford to wait. I think that our leaders are very, very worried right now.

My retirement account is depressing to look at. When I refinanced the ranch debt several years ago, I borrowed some extra money and put it into the stock market, expecting it to grow at 10 to 12 percent for several years; the Federal Land Bank loan was only 6 percent, so I figured I could grow the ranch out of debt via the stock market, and I have made monthly contributions since then, working toward that goal.

I tell myself that, if things get really bad, I can just sell enough land to get out of debt and keep the rest, but by then the reality may be that no one has the money to buy me out. Yet the insulation crew will be here early in the morning, and construction will go on. What else can any of us do except go on with our lives?

I have decided, though, that there is one thing I can do that makes sense to me as a Christian. Enjoy each day I am given on this earth by God, and treasure my friends and family and life's surprises.

Tonight, Loretta and I walked down and fed the goats, and I caught two new babies—twins, a billy kid and a nanny kid who screamed to high heaven as I held them.

We watched two deer walk up the fence line.

We enjoyed watching Mother's cat, Pretty Face, play outside the barn, getting used to her new home.

I finished a TBC membership newsletter, which you will receive shortly if you are a member (if you are not a member, we would love for you to join; it's our members who pay the bills and keep us operating).

Loretta read a book that Mother gave her yesterday, and we spent a little time looking at the lights of San Angelo, 12 miles away.

And I mostly just thought about how blessed I am to be a Christian and know that, no matter what happens, I am loved and saved and secure in Jesus. That is, very simply, what I feel and believe, and it gives me comfort, no matter the circumstances. I hope you feel loved and secure as well, because you are free in Christ, no matter what happens to our economy. And friends, when all's said and done, that's really what matters.



# Texas May Offer Best Hope for Preserving Distinctive Baptist ‘Recipe’

by Ken Camp, *Baptist Standard*, August 25, 2008

DALLAS—Texas Baptists represent the nation’s best hope for maintaining the distinctive blend of beliefs and practices that have characterized Baptists historically, a pastor from the Rio Grande Valley told the Texas Baptists Committed annual convocation.

In the convocation’s keynote sermon, Ellis Orozco, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen, quoted Bill Pinson’s assertion that a unique mix of beliefs and practices—rather than any single doctrine—makes Baptists distinctive.

Pinson, executive director emeritus of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, has used the analogy of a recipe to explain that individual ingredients—or beliefs—may not be unique to Baptists, but when combined, they set Baptists apart and give them their distinctive flavor.

And at a time when “the larger Baptist witness in America” has followed other approaches, Texas Baptists have the potential to preserve the original recipe, Orozco noted.

## Best hope for a Baptist witness

Orozco pointed to paradoxes—an increasingly globalized society and an increasingly polarized nation, a rapidly changing social dynamic and the need to cling to unchanging principles—to illustrate how Texas Baptists are strategically positioned “to be our best—and perhaps only—hope for a distinctively Baptist witness.”

“Our conservative biblicism combined with our love for religious freedom, our penchant for autonomous thought and practice combined with our passion for cooperation, our disdain for hierarchical governance combined with our respect for accountability through congregational leadership, our theological center of grace and grace alone combined with our innate suspicion of anything that smacks of legalism or creedalism—all combine to make us especially adept for the challenge of the next century,” he said.

Unlike denominational groups that have pulled away and isolated themselves, Texas Baptists still have the ability to tap into the trend toward “self-organizing collaborative communities,” Orozco observed.

Although “the larger Baptist voice in America has sold out to one political perspective for 30 pieces of silver,” Texas Baptists have maintained their commitment to the separation of church and state, he noted.

“The church cannot serve a socio-political ideology and Christ at the same time,” he said.

## Retaining a prophetic voice

Because Texas Baptists have not become yoked to one political group, they have retained their prophetic voice and the ability to speak truth to political power.

“Both the left and the right seem to be fighting for a place at the center of political power. And any Christianity operating from that position will be a controlling, legalistic and spiritually oppressive force, unable to distinguish the voices of political allies from God’s voice,” Orozco said.

“That is the very kind of institution that will wither under the weight of globalization. It is, therefore, imperative that we remain distinctively Baptist, because we have the right recipe to be a prophetic voice, speaking from the margins, in a shrinking and dynamically changing world.”

In particular, Orozco urged Texas Baptists to use the prophetic office they have retained to speak on behalf of the poor, marginalized and oppressed.

“We must preserve a distinctively Baptist witness in Texas and the world because the poor are depending on it,” he said. “The poor are depending on our witness in the face of the strongholds of systemic evil in our state and nation.”

## Helping Baptists stay Baptist

A series of panel discussions throughout the convocation focused on how to help churches teach Baptist principles and call distinctively Baptist pastors, help pastors grow genuinely Baptist churches and help students learn historic Baptist beliefs.

In what some church observers call a “post-denominational age,” Doug Weaver, professor in the religion department at Baylor University, emphasized the importance of communicating the best principles that have shaped the Baptist tradition and formed the Baptist identity.

“We have a shared tradition in common with all Christians, and we should glory in that,” he said. “But we also have a distinctive tradition.”

Tommy Brisco, dean of the Hardin-Simmons University’s Logsdon School of Theology, dealt with that same theme in the context of Baptist universities and seminaries. Baptists constitute “one stream that flows into a great Christian stream,” and they should not neglect teaching the distinctive Baptist contributions to Christianity, he said.

Many undergraduate ministerial students identify themselves as Baptist “but have no idea what that means,” Brisco noted. And in many cases, seminary students similarly lack a firm grounding in Baptist principles.

David Garland, dean of Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary, agreed.

“It’s essential that we teach Baptist identity, because they’re not getting it in their churches,” said Garland, who was named Baylor University’s interim president the day after the convocation.

Bruce Corley, president of the B.H. Carroll Theological Institute, asserted the greatest threat to distinctive Baptist principles is aging leadership.

“We’re an old preachers’ denomination,” he said. Pastors under age 35 “are not choosing to go to seminary”—any seminary, Corley said.

## Helping pastors stay strong

In a panel discussion about helping churches call pastors who are committed to distinctive Baptist principles, Texas Baptists Committed Executive Director David Currie warned search committee members not to be deceived.

“Some of the candidates you interview will look you in the eye and lie to you” when asked about where they stand on the controversy that gripped the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s and 1990s and continues to shape the convention today, Currie said.

Neutrality is not an option, he insisted. Any minister who claims to have no position on the issues that divided Southern Baptists “does not have the leadership ability to be your pastor,” he said.

Pastors committed to Baptist principles do their churches a disservice by failing to articulate those commitments in the pulpit, he added.

“Pastors, leave an educated laity who won’t think of calling a fundamentalist pastor,” Currie advised. “Don’t let your legacy be destroyed because you’re afraid of a little controversy.”

Baptist pastors need the support of their peers—ministers who not only share their values, but also face many of the same challenges, members of one panel stressed.

“It used to be that the name ‘Baptist’ was enough of a network in itself,” said Chad Chaddick, who recently moved from Borger to become pastor of Northeast Baptist Church in San Antonio. But denominational division and generational issues have undercut trust, he said.

“I’m a poster child for the need for a peer-group network,” Chaddick said.

September 9, 2008

## Ten Suggestions for Celebrating the 400th Anniversary of Baptist Beginnings

by Charles W. Deweese

*Executive Director, Baptist History and Heritage Society*  
(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is used with the permission of the Baptist History and Heritage Society. For information about the Society and its resources, go to [www.baptisthistory.org](http://www.baptisthistory.org).)

Baptists will celebrate their 400th birthday in 2009. Consider leading your church to adopt some of the suggested anniversary projects described below. See the Baptist History and Heritage Society's website ([www.baptisthistory.org](http://www.baptisthistory.org)) for resources that your church can use to enhance its celebration.

1. **Plan a special Baptist Heritage Sunday.** This day of celebration could include the following:
  1. Scripture readings that serve as the basis for historic Baptist values, such as believer's baptism (Matt. 3:13-17; Rom. 6:3-4), religious liberty (John 8:32, 36; Rom. 6:17-18, 22; 1 Cor. 7:22; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13), and the priesthood of all believers (Matt. 27:45-51; 1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10)
  2. Hymns that reflect on the past, present, and future, such as "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and "Come, Holy Spirit, Dove Divine"
  3. A Baptist heritage-based sermon (see examples of such sermons on the website [www.baptisthistory.org](http://www.baptisthistory.org))
  4. Prayers of gratitude for the sacrifices of Baptist ancestors
  5. Quotes on the values of Baptist history, such as
    - a) "We meet as Baptists. We have a great history. We are trustees for great principles. We face great opportunities. We are not sufficiently conscious of our history and the notable contribution we have made to the cause of individual liberty, civil and religious" (Helen Barrett Montgomery, 1922).
    - b) "The occasional backward look should give us poise and patience and courage and faith" (George W. Truett, 1936).
    - c) "History is more than a description of what is finished. It can be a resource for the present and a guide for the future" (Penrose St. Amant, 1972).
  6. Audiovisuals depicting Baptist founders and shapers in your church
  7. A special hymn commissioned to be sung on the occasion.
2. **Involve youth and older children in your celebration.** Organize a birthday party for the Baptist tradition. Sponsor a 250-word essay contest for children and one for youth on Baptist heroes (let the winners read their stories in public worship). Order for youth and older children copies of the brief new book (May 2008), *Portraits of Courage: Stories of Baptist Heroes*, by Julie Whidden Long, minister to children at First Baptist Church, Macon, Georgia. Available from the Baptist History and Heritage Society, this book was written specifically to support the involvement of youth and older children in celebrating Baptists' 400th anniversary. Youth and older children will thoroughly enjoy this illustration-filled publication.
3. **Write, produce, and present a play, pageant, or historical monologue that focuses on Baptist origins in 1609 and on your church's origins.** Present this on Baptist Heritage Sunday or on another special occasion. Identify the key individuals, locations, times, and circumstances surrounding Baptist beginnings and your church's beginnings. Show the similarities and differences between the two beginnings. Help your church understand the importance of origins for contemporary Baptist life.
4. **Prepare, publish, and share with all church members a series of two pamphlets:**
  1. A summary of your church's history and values
  2. A list and description of the top 10 Baptist values across 400 years (examples follow):
    - Lordship of Christ
    - Authority of Scripture
    - Passion for liberty
    - Necessity of personal faith
    - Believer's baptism, Lord's Supper, and general worship
    - Regenerate church membership
    - Priesthood of all believers
    - Voluntarism
    - Congregational/associational spirit
    - Evangelistic and missionary imperative
5. **Display and exhibit your church's history.** Give the exhibit a theme. Include photographs, artifacts, hymnbooks, church-related quilts, sermon manuscripts, a timeline to show how your church's history fits into the 400 years of Baptists, and other items. Label all items in the display so that it is clear what they are. Use a formal exhibit unit, a wall display, a table display—or a combination of these. Make the display/exhibit as prominent as possible by placing it in your church's foyer or other highly-visible area. Use a committee to coordinate this effort. Promote the exhibit through church media. Leave it up at least a month.
6. **Develop a plan for capturing the oral history memoirs of your oldest church members.** Assign this project to your Church History Committee—or to a special oral history committee. Select the interviewers and interviewees. Provide questions in advance to the interviewees. Tape-record or videotape the interviews. Transcribe tape-recorded interviews. Consider including some of these recorded memoirs in the special worship service on Baptist Heritage Sunday in 2009, or create a separate worship service in which selected memoirs are presented.
7. **Create a plan for locating and preserving your church's records.** Assign this plan to your Church History Committee. Identify which records should be located and preserved (church minutes, deacons' meeting minutes, associational minutes, membership books, legal papers, financial records, church

bulletins, newsletters, directories, brochures, scrapbooks, newspaper articles, plaques, objects of historical value, and other items). Secure complete records. Gather, organize, label, and file materials collected. Preserve all records using high standards of preservation. Consult your local history program for guidelines. Make records available for church displays and research.

8. **Launch the publication of a new or updated book-length history of your church.** Such a publication can have many potential values for your church. It can acquaint new and prospective members with the church's story, clarify the church's identity and mission, and help members bear a knowledgeable witness in behalf of the church. Plan the project carefully: Coordinate through the church's History Committee, secure church approval for the project and its funding, select a competent writer, and choose a good publisher or printer. Conduct the research. Write the story. Use editorial readers. Include many photographs and other visuals. Print a copy for every church family—and for every family projected to join in the next five years. Dedicate the published history on a Sunday morning. Promote the distribution of the history. Use the history to create a series of history-based articles for the church newsletter.
9. **Secure key resources for your church library or media center.** All these items are available from the Baptist History and Heritage Society.
  - The Baptist Origins Series* of 8 pamphlets (\$1.75 per set)
  - The Baptist Style for a New Century Series* of 9 pamphlets (\$2.25 per set)
  - The Baptist Heritage Library Series* of 14 booklets (\$28.00 per set)
  - The Story of Baptists in the United States* (\$29.00 each)
  - A How-to Manual for Your Church's History* (\$10.00 each)
10. **Join the Baptist History and Heritage Society.** You or your church will receive three annual issues each of the journal, *Baptist History and Heritage*, and the newsletter, *Baptist Heritage Update* (see the Society's website, [www.baptisthistory.org](http://www.baptisthistory.org), for a membership form). Membership will help you and your church keep current with major developments in Baptist history.

October 10, 2008

## Donate Now, and Double Your Money!

by J. Brent Walker

Executive Director, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

Double your money in this economy? Where can you get such a great return on your investment?! Only here.

The Baptist Joint Committee is at a critical juncture in its

capital campaign to establish a Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill. Thanks to a matching challenge by Texan Patsy Ayres, we have the opportunity to double new **pledges or gifts** to the campaign, made through October 31st. So far, through this challenge, we have added **\$111,493** to the campaign fund, every dollar of which Patsy Ayres will match. **But we need to raise even more!**

Currently, the BJC carries out its mission to defend and extend religious liberty from rented space on the third floor of a Washington, D.C., office building. The BJC is already a leading voice for religious liberty and church-state separation. A Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill will help take the BJC to the next level.

Located within only a few blocks of the U.S. Capitol, the Library of Congress, and the Supreme Court, the BJC's Center for Religious Liberty will do the following:

- \* Serve as the nerve center of the BJC's activities in Washington
- \* Provide education space and resources for those who cherish religious liberty
- \* Serve as a visible "monument" to the principle of religious liberty as the BJC ensures the protection of this precious freedom
- \* Serve as a center for training youth, pastors, laity, and others who actively advocate and advance religious liberty in their local communities
- \* Provide a historical setting for meetings, receptions, and events near the Capitol

Fund raising for the Center has been steady over the life of the campaign, with more than half of the needed \$5 million already pledged or given. Now is the time to respond to Patsy Ayres' challenge if you haven't already. Pledge your support for the BJC's Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill. You have up to 3 years to pay off your pledge. Please give what you can. An investment in religious liberty today will pay immeasurable dividends for generations to come.

It is imperative that we all fortify ourselves for the fight for religious liberty. No matter the outcome of the elections in November, threats to religious liberty will continue. All of us need for the BJC to have the strongest presence possible in our nation's capital, standing firm for the First Amendment - for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

All contributions to the BJC are tax-deductible. Thanks for your support!!

**To make your pledge today, contact Kristin Clifton by email at [kclifton@bjconline.org](mailto:kclifton@bjconline.org), or call 202-544-4226.**



October 17, 2008

## Academic Freedom at Baptist Colleges and Universities

by David Sallee

President, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri

One of the most significant challenges facing Baptist colleges and universities is the long-standing interest of some persons in limiting the freedom of faculty and students in their pursuit of themes, questions, and topics that might fall outside what some Baptists would be comfortable with. A recent complaint offered on my campus reflects a common viewpoint on the issue of academic freedom: the parent of a student expressed concern about our choice of a speaker for a science lecture. The parent questioned the propriety of the College's decision to host a lecturer who is outspoken in support of evolution. Believing that academic freedom, even in the very limited context of listening to a speaker, should not be practiced at a church-related college, the parent was adamant that students should not be exposed to perspectives that he considered outside the mainstream of Christian beliefs.

I responded by pointing out that academic freedom is fundamental to developing high-level intellectual skills, the primary function of a college. While that function is not the same as the church's function, it is complementary. Fundamental to development of critical-thinking skills is affording students an opportunity to raise questions, consider topics counter to their point of view, and allow themselves to address notions never before considered. It is not our institutional goal to shape students' final perspective on a subject such as evolution but, rather, to give them the tools to eventually shape their own perspectives. Our expectation is that such presentations stimulate in-depth discussion and thoughtful reflection on the part of students and faculty. If that occurs, students move a step closer to developing those high-level intellectual skills.

A few years ago, another guest speaker gave an impassioned presentation on why America should not engage in early stem cell research. Before he presented his argument, the speaker advised the audience that he would speak passionately and with conviction on the topic; however, he also cautioned that he was not convinced that he was right. When the speaker finished his remarks, a student asked him how he could speak with such conviction yet not be certain that he was right. Our speaker responded by pointing out that there are very smart people he respects who

disagree with his perspective — and that they *might* be right. More important, though, he said that this discussion is not about winning or losing the argument, but about finding the truth.

We can find the truth only if we are free to search for it. Students can find the truth and meaning in their lives only if faculty members have the freedom to lead, and to follow, those students where their searches take them. Limiting freedom of searching and freedom of expression does not make for better Christians or better churches or better colleges.

The purpose of academic freedom is to create a space in which ideas can be studied and shared and reviewed and reconsidered in the belief that exploration will produce a better-educated graduate. I am convinced that a populace that is thoughtful and active in exploring the questions of faith is better for the church; citizens who have honed their critical-thinking skills are better for the community, better for our country. Christians who have come to their beliefs by *developing* them, rather than *receiving* them, will continue to adjust as their world changes and will face uncertainty with more confidence and authenticity. To be better educated, however, students and faculty must be free to explore.

To hold the position that academic freedom is necessary for a great education requires, however, a clear understanding of how the church experience and the college experience relate to each other. Barbara Brown Taylor, in a column in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, spoke to this issue:

*In the end, I think, it is not a matter of pitting church (or synagogue or masjid) against classroom, but of discerning what each does best. As the primary place where religious identity is formed, church is where seekers learn the stories of their faith in community and celebrate the rituals that keep that story alive. In that context, it makes sense for religious leaders to offer answers to life's big questions, so that followers may articulate the difference between themselves and others on similar paths. In church, religion is not chiefly something to be studied but something to be practiced. It is a way of life.*

*By contrast, the classroom is a secondary space, where religious affiliation is not a requirement for admission. Those*

### ABOUT DAVID SALLEE & WILLIAM JEWELL COLLEGE

I recently asked **David Sallee** to share, with TBC friends and supporters, his perspective on the importance of academic freedom to religious liberty. David and I were both in the 1973 graduating class of Oklahoma Baptist University, and I am proud to call him my friend.

The result of my request is the accompanying column, "Academic Freedom at Baptist Colleges and Universities."

Although historically Baptist, **William Jewell College** elected to sever its ties to the Missouri Baptist Convention in 2003, following a debate about academic freedom and self-governance.

At TBC, we hold fast to historic Baptist principles, at the core of which is the God-granted freedom that lies at the heart of the Gospel. **William Jewell College**, though no longer affiliated with

any Baptist convention, stands firmly for that freedom at a time that many institutions still identifying themselves as Baptist have chosen to yield to the relentless pressure of Fundamentalists to exercise control over them.

Holding fast to freedom and academic integrity, **William Jewell College** now stands as a national liberal arts college that equips its students to — as **David Sallee** says in his column — search freely for the truth.

For details on the courageous and principled stand that **David Sallee** and **William Jewell College** have taken for academic freedom, please read—following David's column—our reprint of the 2003 *Academe* magazine article, "This Jewell Is a Real Gem."

- **Bill Jones**, *TBC Communications Editor*

## BAPTIST REFLECTIONS

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with faith commitments are welcome to participate, but not to dominate. While their interest in the academic study of religion is what brings them together, that study will not prescribe how they answer life's big questions. It will only teach them how others have answered those questions before them and are answering them even now. In the classroom, what students have most in common is not their religion but their humanity, and at this universal remove from the hotter issues of their faith, they are invited to encounter one another in all their differences.

For Baptist colleges to be great colleges means that they must first be great centers of intellectual challenge, with the freedom to address the most difficult, sometimes distasteful, issues. "Encounter[ing] one another in all their differences" is at the heart

of education but is often difficult for the church to embrace. Therefore, establishing clarity of function and commitment to both academic freedom and to broad Christian principles is the ongoing challenge for colleges that relate to the church. Such clarity and commitment, however, should produce graduates in whom no part of decision-making is untouched by faith and no part of faith unaffected by the world in which they live. (Westlie)

Sources:

Taylor, Barbara Brown; "Questions of Faith," *the Chronicle of Higher Education*, Volume 53, Issue 24, p. B14, February 16, 2007.

Westlie, John; from an unpublished paper at William Jewell College, "College Mission, Christian Mission, and Academic Mission," October 2005.

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## State of the Profession: This Jewell Is a Real Gem

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by Martin D. Snyder

Director of Planning and Development, American Association of University Professors  
(Reprinted from *Academe* magazine, November-December 2003 issue)

Higher education faces hard choices these days, choices often dictated by the tightest budgets colleges and universities have seen in a decade. Improvident tax cuts by state legislatures and faltering investment returns have left educational institutions, both public and private, scratching for every nickel and dime. It took considerable guts, therefore, for William Jewell College to reject the demands of the Missouri Baptist Convention, a decision that cost the college nearly a million dollars, about 3 percent of its operating budget.

William Jewell College, named Liberal Arts College of the Year by *Time* magazine in 2001, is one of the oldest colleges west of the Mississippi River. It has a 154-year tradition of providing a rigorous liberal arts education in an atmosphere that encourages the exploration of religious values. Its students come from diverse cultural backgrounds; about 66 percent are not Baptists. The college has maintained close ties with the Missouri Baptist Convention, at least until recently.

According to the *Online Baptist Standard* news magazine, the trouble between the college and the convention began two years ago when a fundamentalist movement gained control of most convention boards and committees. The change prompted five Baptist institutions in the state to change their charters to create self-perpetuating boards. The convention is challenging their actions in court. William Jewell College, however, has always elected its own board. The convention leadership, unable to exert control over the college by packing its board, decided upon an alternative strategy. It launched a formal investigation of William Jewell's policies and practices. The committee charged with the investigation concluded, according to its chair, that the college failed to "fall in line with what we believe are God's teachings."

The *Sun-News of the Northland* reports that the committee faulted the college for insisting upon its right to elect its own trustees; permitting the student government to consider a change in the Student Bill of Rights to forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation; failing to censor the student newspaper; allowing a theater student to produce portions of the *Vagina Monologues* as a senior recital; declining to provide to the convention personal information about trustees and faculty, including their church membership and affiliations with non-college organizations; and refusing to outline its official position on the *Genesis*

account of creation. When the college failed to address the convention's concerns, the convention's executive board by a vote of forty-four to four decided not to continue funding William Jewell. The chair of the board's administrative committee called the vote "a belabored, prayerful decision." He added: "It's about holiness, righteousness and godliness."

William Jewell's president, David Sallee, had a different take on the decision. "The whole thing is about control," he told the *Sun-News of the Northland*, "and it's about how you define 'superior Christian education.' We're just not going to allow the convention . . . to dictate what we do."

Sallee and the William Jewell board defended the college's independent system of governance. "Since its founding in 1849," Sallee said in a statement posted on the college Web site, "William Jewell has been governed by an independent, self-perpetuating board of trustees. And our work today continues a long tradition and commitment to creating a distinctively Christian environment in which a free exchange of ideas can occur that respects the intersection of faith and learning, as well as the individuals who participate in that process. Decisions about how the college is managed have historically been made by our board of trustees, by our faculty and administration, and not by others. This system of self-governance has served the college exceedingly well for more than a hundred and fifty years."

The case of William Jewell College illustrates the intimate connection between governance and academic freedom. In order to control what might or might not be thought and said on the William Jewell campus, the leadership of the Missouri Baptist Convention launched an attack on the college's independent system of governance. By seizing control of the board of trustees, the convention would have gained the ultimate say over administrative and faculty appointments, over what was taught and by whom, and over the whole tenor of student and community life on campus. But the college stood its ground, refusing to yield to these extortive demands. It cost the college considerable money, but, as Sallee told the *Sun-News of the Northland*, "In our minds the freedom and standing for the principles that we have stood for in this confrontation are well worth the money."

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October 24, 2008

## Guarding the House

by Paul Kenley

Pastor, Grace Fellowship, Lampasas

*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! - Acts 20:28-31 (NIV)*

My wife has a temporary job, working for a justice of the peace in our county. Because of the questionable character of some of those who make their way through that office, the judge keeps a huge Rottweiler visible to them. One of my wife's first duties was to make friends with Rambo! While you might think that having a huge dog roaming around an office detracts from the professional atmosphere, the mitigating concern was to be on guard in the presence of those who might threaten your safety.

Before Texas Baptists meet for our Annual Meeting in Fort Worth next month, I feel a word of warning is in order. I turned 61 last month, have pastored churches in Texas for 34 years, and have spent much time and effort in the Texas Baptists Committed battle to preserve the freedom of the BGCT from Fundamentalist control. I wish we could reasonably conclude that "the battle is over, and we won." However, this is simply not true. The very nature of Fundamentalism is to never relent in asserting itself. And, ironically, its greatest opportunity for success lies in the complacent and mistaken assumption that it has given up on Texas. So I offer two reasons why I

know this is not the case.

1. Fundamentalist leaders, when they lost their attempt to gain political control of the BGCT, pulled away to form their own convention—the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC). This mechanism gave them a forum. But note that, apart from their participation in—and support of—the Southern Baptist Convention itself, they have no direct ministries! They have no hospitals, no universities, no seminaries, no children's homes.

This dearth of institutions and ministries has been lost on those churches that have fled the BGCT, usually under the short-sighted leadership of a Fundamentalist pastor, who failed to mention this critical detail before leading them to vote to uniquely align with the SBTC.

That being said, however, SBTC leaders realize that this lack of these vital ministries is a drawback. I believe that they plan to eventually rectify the situation.

How will they go about doing it? Start up these ministries and institutions on their own? In today's economy? I think not. I believe they will make a strong and reinvigorated attempt to do it as their parent-leaders in the SBC did it in the 80s and 90s—by stealing ministries and institutions that are already in existence! What is the shortest route to such an acquisition? Take over the Baptist General Convention of Texas! Yes, I understand that many of the institutions have taken individual steps to safeguard themselves against such a takeover, but the Fundamentalists could still make great strides by capturing the convention lead-

ership and structure. That's the strategy they used 30 years ago in the SBC.

All of this leaves our executive staff teetering on a tightrope. Some of the largest churches, which still give large amounts of money to the BGCT as a carry-over from a day before they themselves called Fundamentalist pastors, might well threaten to greatly reduce, or even cut off, their gifts to the BGCT. No fiduciary officer would like to see that happen. But the truth remains that those who fail to stand for something will fall for anything. The dilemma is how long, and to what extent, can we afford to feign oneness with these churches for the sake of keeping the budget afloat?

2. This year, I have been serving on one of the BGCT's key committees, where I have had the opportunity to observe what I believe to be subtle, precursory efforts toward a Fundamentalist "repositioning" aimed at reclaiming leadership. There is no one incident that, by itself, proves this suspicion, but the preponderance of events has alarmed this old TBC warrior! We must be careful, lest the noble cry that "We must be inclusive" winds up empowering those who, perhaps unknowingly and with the best intentions, would take us back into a precarious position.

I do not pretend to have the answer as to whether TBC should or should not endorse candidates for convention office. I will leave that for its leaders to decide. Just remember, though, that one uninformed committee on committees can inflict serious damage, and that committee chairs are appointed by the officers of the convention. I DO know that we cannot afford to relax our guard, lest we unwittingly jeopardize all we have fought for and see it ultimately undone.

I know that many will consider me an alarmist. But, at this point in the later years of my ministry, I would rather sound a trumpet than shrink back in indifference. *Acts 20:30* is especially instructive—"Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."

Let's get to Fort Worth and stay on guard!

### Been to the TBC Web site lately?

**If you haven't checked out the TBC Web site lately, we invite you to go to [www.txbc.org](http://www.txbc.org) today. In recent months, we have made enhancements that we hope will make it more useful to you. On our home page, you will be directed to the latest editions of the *TBC Newsletter*; David R. Currie's *A Rancher's Rumblings* column; and the *Baptist Reflections* column written by various Baptist leaders; as well as archives for all three of these publications. Our home page also features news about upcoming Baptist events. In the months to come, we will add even more enhancements, including links to up-to-the-moment Baptist news and views. Stay tuned!**



# Resources to Help Churches Teach Baptist Principles

by Ross West, Publisher, BaptistWay Press®

“Not on our watch” is the statement we sometimes hear when people want to emphasize that, if they have anything to do about it, some dire happening absolutely will not happen. Unfortunately, however, something dire is headed toward happening “on our watch” if we don’t do something about it.

That “something dire” is the distinct possibility, among many Baptist churches and members of Baptist churches, that they will forget Baptist principles. The result will be that, while the name “Baptist” might remain, Baptist principles will fade far into the background if not into oblivion. However, we don’t have to let that happen.

BaptistWay Press® has a number of helpful, easy-to-use, nominally-priced (some even free) resources that churches will find useful in teaching Baptist principles. Resource materials won’t solve the problem by themselves, but they can be helpful in the hands of people who are determined to help churches and church members continue to live in accord with our Baptist principles.

Consider these helpful resources:

## \* Beliefs Important to Baptists

This resource, which has been prepared for adults, consists of 13 study sessions on Baptist beliefs. It can be used in many settings, including Sunday School. A teaching guide is also available. Furthermore, the content of this book is available in one volume or in three units of four lessons each, plus one stand-alone lesson.

## \* Baptist Doctrine and Heritage Study

Churches can use this resource to conduct an annual study of significant areas of Baptist doctrine and heritage, focusing on a different area each year. The newest study is *Bible Truths About God*, by James Semple. Also available are *Baptists and Religious*

*Liberty*, by William Pinson, Jr.; *Jesus Is Lord*, by Howard K. Batson; and *The Bible—You Can Believe It*, by Jim Denison. A teaching guide and other teaching resources are also available. In addition, *Baptists and Religious Liberty* is available in a large-print edition, as well as in a Spanish edition entitled *Los Bautistas y la Libertad de Religión*.

## \* Important Baptist Stuff

This resource for youth is available online at [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org). It provides four sessions for youth. Plus the price is definitely right—FREE! A teaching plan is also provided, and it too is FREE.

## \* Let’s Explore Baptist Beliefs

This is a five-session study developed especially for children, and it has an accompanying Leader’s Guide. This attractive study has been used effectively by many churches.

In addition to these products that specifically emphasize Baptist principles, don’t underestimate the importance of your church’s ongoing Sunday School classes in either encouraging or discouraging Baptist principles. One of the important benefits of BaptistWay Press® Bible study materials is that they value the historic biblical distinctives of Baptists. These study materials emphasize genuine Bible study and are written by trusted, qualified Baptist writers who are given the freedom to interpret and apply the Bible as Baptists. BaptistWay Press® Bible study materials are available for all age groups and in seven languages.

Are you ready to “seize the day” rather than allow Baptist principles to slip away from us? Check out the study materials we have developed to help you and your church at [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org), or call 1-866-249-1799 to request an order form of our products for your church.

## Annual TBC Breakfast at the BGCT

7 a.m., Tuesday, November 11, 2008

Fort Worth Convention Center

I am requesting \_\_\_\_ reservation(s) for the 2008 TBC Breakfast at the BGCT.

I am enclosing \$ \_\_\_\_ at \$20 per reservation.

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Mail this form, with your check, to: **Texas Baptists Committed**

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**MISSION STATEMENT OF TEXAS BAPTISTS COMMITTED**

**Texas Baptists Committed is dedicated to reaching people for Christ through local churches; promoting and defending historic Baptist principles; spreading an understanding of Baptist heritage and distinctives through education; and cooperating with the mission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and its related institutions.**

*The TBC Newsletter is a periodical published and mailed to churches in Texas and to all Baptists Committed members and supporters. You may be on several lists. If you get two newsletters, please pass one along to a friend. Send Address changes to: P.O. Box 3330, San Angelo, Texas 76902-3330.*

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