



Executive Director's Report to the Executive Board, September 22, 2025

Introduction: A Prayer for Unity

Those of you who follow me on social media, know that every Sunday morning I post a prayer for our churches. As I prepared the prayer I posted yesterday, the Bible passage that came to mind was that of Jesus' high priestly prayer recorded in John 17:1-21.

As Jesus nears the completion of his work on earth, he prays for his disciples. He prays for the Father to glorify Him, to sanctify his disciples, and for the world to know that eternal life is found in Christ. The climax of the prayer is his plea for unity in the church.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

If you ever want to make sure that God hears your prayers, if you ever want to make sure that God will answer your prayers, pray what Jesus prayed. You can be confident that whatever Jesus prayed for pleases the Father.

Oh how do we need to pray that today. We need to pray for unity in our churches. We need to pray for unity in our convention. We need to pray for unity among Christians. In a culture where division, tribalism and polarization seems to be the order of the day, we need the counter-cultural posture of unity in Christ.

You and I know that unity is not the same thing as uniformity. Unity does not require full agreement on all things. It does require commonality in those things that are most essential, of course. But unity does not mean we silence dissenting voices. Unity does not mean we do not have civil discourse. Unity means that at the end of the day we remember we are family.

We have the same Father. We have the same Savior. We possess the same Holy Spirit. We stand on the same Scriptures. We share one baptism, one communion table, one message of good news to the world, one Great Commandment and one Great Commission. We are one!





Personal Comments

Two years ago, at this September executive board meeting, you voted me in as your executive director. Although I did not begin my role until that November, today marks an important milestone for me. (My understanding is that most of those who voted for me have not regretted it). If truth be told, the honeymoon is over.

Regardless, I am thankful for the role I get to play and I thoroughly enjoy my job. So, thank you for this opportunity.

Almost every week I get to be in one of our churches or on the campus of one of our institutions. Monica often travels with me. Sometimes we get to go to large churches in big cities. Other times we get to go to small churches in very rural areas.

Recently, as we returned from a small church in West Texas surrounded by cotton farms, as we drove on winding county roads, Monica expressed how blessed we are to get to do what we do. I fully agreed. We are blessed indeed!

We are seeing God at work. God is doing a new thing in many of our churches, on many of our college campuses, and in the mission field. We see the incredible opportunities to join Him. This is a good time to be a Texas Baptists!

At the same time, it is not lost on me that we face multiple challenges. There is much brokenness in the world. We are surrounded by a culture of violence in deeds and in words. There's polarization in politics, in social media, in entertainment and even in church.

The pastor of the church I attended yesterday said, "people are scrutinizing every word we say or post, and assuming the worst possible motive and meaning." It's tense, fragile and exhausting.

I am also aware that these are trying times for our convention. While we have pastors and churches that are very excited about what is going on and the direction we are heading, not everyone shares that excitement.

We have churches that are increasing their commitment to the BGCT and we have others who are joining us afresh. They are saying to us, "Texas Baptists is our tribe. We resonate with the orthodox doctrine, the commitment to Baptist identity, and the focus on the mission of God."

Yet others are trying to figure out if they stay or they leave. Some are deciding whether to move from single alignment with the state convention to dual alignment.





Some of those who are not certain about their future commitment to us have legitimate questions and concerns. We want to do our best to answer those and to address them properly.

Almost every week we also encounter pastors and churches who have been misinformed or who misunderstand who we are. When they reach out, we do our best to bring clarity and to tell the truth in love. When they don't reach out, we encourage them to do so.

And, if we are honest, there are a few out there who are simply standing in opposition, and even seeking to cause division. For those, we pray that God will change their heart and that God will give Texas Baptists the discernment to see the difference.

As we are surrounded with these challenges and others, I am committed to staying the course. I am committed to lead with confidence, with love for our entire Baptist family, and with humility.

I have more to share with you than I have time, so allow me to mention some highlights and elaborate on what might be more timely.

Summer Highlights

Much has happened this summer since we last met at Hardin-Simmons University last May.

SBC in Dallas

In June the Southern Baptist Convention met here in Dallas. Along with Guidestone Financial Services, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and SBTC, Texas Baptists cohosted this event.

Among other things, it allowed us to have a large and very visible exhibit, which our communications team and our events coordinator designed and put together. Our staff received many from our Texas Baptists family and others guests inquiring about who we are. It gave us an opportunity to share our new developing GC2 vision.

On Monday night we hosted a dinner for pastors, spouses and other messengers of Texas Baptists churches. Approximately 200 people attended this event. Participants heard an update about GC2 Strong and prayed over Larry Mayberry, pastor of Queens Church in New York and newly elected director of the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, both with whom Texas Baptists partners



Crossover

One of the most significant things was Crossover Dallas, which we did in partnership with the Dallas Baptist Association and NAMB. Greg Ammons, pastor of FBC Garland, led the effort on the side of Texas Baptists churches. Oza Jones, our director of evangelism worked alongside him. Dr. Ryan Jespersen, director of the Dallas Baptist Association, is here. They will share in person about this event.

BWA Congress

Another very exciting event for us was the Baptist World Alliance Congress in Brisbane, Australia. As you may know, while the BWA has annual gatherings, the Congress is every five years and it is a mega celebration of global Baptists. In 2020, because of the pandemic, an in-person congress was not possible. So this was the first time in 10 years for this meeting.

Approximately 3,200 Baptists from 130 countries gathered in one venue for worship, encouragement and vision casting, if you can imagine that. Imagine the banners of different nations as they march in the worship center. Imagine singing together sometimes the same song but in different languages.

There were at least 100 Texas Baptists leaders, pastors, institutional representatives and church members present at this 23rd Baptist World Alliance Congress. General Secretary Elijah Brown, a product of Texas Baptists, cast the vision for the Acts 2 movement, which seeks the renewal of the global church in order to collaborate in the Great Commission, with specific goals for the year 2033.

Several of us, Texas Baptists, led Bible studies or facilitated breakout sessions. Five ministries related to Texas Baptists were accepted as members of the BWA during the global council meeting.

Our Texas Baptist Missions Foundation president, Jerry Carlisle, was elected chairman of the BWA trustees committee, one of the three general offices. Multiple other Texas Baptists were elected to various commissions. Texas Baptists are making a great contribution to the global work of Baptists, while at the same time benefiting from this kingdom collaboration.

As joyful as this celebration was, sadly people in the Texas Hill Country were dealing with the aftermath of the epic flood along the Guadalupe River. From a distance, many of us grieved, some coordinated response efforts, and all of us prayed for the hundreds of people who suffered losses.



FBC Marble Falls

At the hotel in Brisbane, during breakfast, I would get to visit with various people from Texas. One of those was Pastor Ross Chandler of the First Baptist Church Marble Falls. I noticed that he was preoccupied and on his phone a lot. When I asked him about it, he told me he was coordinating efforts to mobilize his people in disaster relief back home. I would like him to share with you briefly about that along with a related video.

I know we will hear a report from Texans on Mission tomorrow. They are our premier partners in disaster relief. We are proud of them. We support them. And we direct donors to them. Nevertheless, I want to remind us that many, if not most, of the TBM volunteers are members of our churches. Their base of operations is usually one of our churches. And, in some cases, it is our churches that are on the front lines. Texans on Mission, BSM, and Texas Baptists churches are kingdom partners.

Tanzania Baptist Convention

From Brisbane, I travelled to Dodoma, Tanzania, in order to join a small team of TXB staff, pastors and spouses. We were invited by Tanzanian Baptists to participate in their annual meeting. Approximately 400 Tanzanian Baptists travelled from all over the country via car, bus or train for this celebratory occasion.

Of special significance was the dedication of a new Tanzania Baptists headquarters building. Texas Baptists contributed to the construction of this facility. During the dedication ceremony, Tanzania Baptists received dignitaries from the Tanzanian President's office. They joined the worship services, and I had the honor of preaching a gospel message during this occasion.

We were also blessed to meet our MAP missionaries. These Tanzanian individuals are starting churches in areas where there are no evangelical churches with great diligence and often with great personal sacrifice. They are supported in part by their national convention and adopted by one of our Texas Baptists churches. Fifty US dollars a month is going a long way!

We had the opportunity of signing an MOU with Tanzania Baptists, committing to collaborate with six MAP missionaries and the goal of having ten in the course of one year. Texas Baptists are making an impact in Eastern Africa.





Pastor Strong Retreat

As the summer came to an end, I had the privilege of participating in the Pastor Strong Retreat at the Silver Cliff Ranch in Colorado. It was an incredible time of fellowship, recreation, rest and worship.

Kevin Abbott, Area 5 representative and director of Pastoral Health Networks, and his team have led Pastor Strong cohorts in the College Station area, the Houston area, the San Antonio/Austin area and the DFW area this year, in collaboration with the respective local associations, and culminating in this powerful retreat with all four cohorts together.

Forty-seven pastors and network leaders shared outdoor experiences, testimonies, prayed over each other, practiced vulnerability and encouraged each other in their ministry journey. I am convinced that pastors need to be in authentic community.

We are confident that the relationships these pastors and ministerial leaders have developed will be long-lasting, will contribute to their health and our churches will be more effective because of this ministry.

The GC2 Strong strategy that we are developing seeks to focus on three areas: strengthening churches, ministerial leaders and mission partnerships. We need churches to be strong in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in order to reach our state.

Healthy churches require healthy pastors. We want to foster ministerial health so that those who lead our churches and ministries are healthy spiritually, emotionally, in their family life, in their finances, in their relationships, as well as intellectually and physically.

We believe that healthy churches and healthy ministerial leaders will naturally be on mission with God. Churches and pastors who are Great Commandment and Great Commission Strong will be strong in partnering for missions locally and globally.

It is our hope to scale this over the next few years, starting new cohorts and extending to other parts of our state.

GC2 Design Team

The summer has also been a busy time for our GC2 Design Team. As you might remember, this past spring we concluded phase 1 of what we called the “Clarifying the Call” process led by a team which this board endorsed last year. At that time the board also affirmed my intention of adding a staff member who would oversee the GC2 initiative.



Sergio A. Ramos: Senior Director of Relational Development and GC2

A year ago I hired Sergio Ramos to occupy this new position. On this occasion of his first anniversary and as background of how the GC2 design team is progressing, I would like to share with you a little about him and why he is serving where he is.

Approximately 25 years ago, Sergio led an initiative at Tarrant Baptist Association in partnership with Union Baptist Association that offered pastoral and church renewal. I was a pastor in Fort Worth and that process was transformational for me. To this day the pastors and churches who were part of that initiative are thriving and remain connected.

Sergio went on from TBA to serve on the staff of Worldconnex, and then he spent the next sixteen years working for Buckner International. During that time, Brother Ramos served in the area of church relations. He led the establishment of Buckner NGOs in other countries, often working with government officials. His experience in international relationships included Central America, Eastern Europe and Africa.

Sergio Ramos also served Buckner as it related to the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), including the North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF) and the Latin American Baptist Union (UBLA), often being a Buckner ambassador to these.

Brother Ramos is a product of Texas Baptists education ministry. He graduated from the Valley Baptist Academy in Harlingen, obtained his bachelor's degree from East Texas Baptist University in Marshall, his masters' degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a second masters in leadership from Dallas Baptist Association.

His experience, education and skills has been a gift to us as we give structure and strategy to GC2. When I hired him I told him, *"you are coming to a new position and a new role that we haven't completely figured out. You will help me figure it out as we seek the Lord's direction and as we listen to staff, pastors, churches and experts."*

GC2 Design Process

This year we transitioned into the next phase which we are calling the GC2 Design Process. After an executive leadership team retreat and a broader leadership team retreat, we took the missional theme, the seven values, the three areas of focus and recommended the general direction of our GC2 initiative.

We also identified the importance of three things that should undergird our strategy: (1) Revival (awakening) (2) Relationships (incarnational) (3) Resources (provision).



I shared with this board last May that our GC2 Strong initiative would become the centerpiece of our work, that we would seek to realign our organization around it, that we would strive to offer customized resources for our churches, and that we would serve our Texas churches without ignoring our churches outside of Texas.

This board affirmed that plan at our meeting in the chapel of HSU. Subsequently our design process was launched this past summer. Sergio Ramos, senior director of relational development and GC2, enlisted the design team. They have been meeting weekly and working hard to design a process that will serve our churches well. Tomorrow you will hear a report from Sergio about the progress this team has made.

GC2 Strong Questions and Clarity

As we approach the Texas Baptists Annual Meeting Nov. 16-18 in Abilene, TX, we are anticipating the opportunity to explore our theme: “Live Out GC2: Love God, Love People, Make Disciples.” We hope to unpack this in our plenary sessions and in our breakouts.

Because the GC2 focus has existed and evolved over the past ten years, there has been some confusion about what it is. I am thankful for pastors and others who have written or called asking questions and seeking clarification.

One of my primary objectives since I became the executive director has been to provide clarity. It has been said, “clarity is kindness,” and I agree. At the same time, I want to acknowledge that we have engaged in a process where we are seeking the Lord’s direction for the future, and the truth is, we have not figured everything out yet. So, we are sharing as we are discovering.

A couple of weeks ago I wrote an article in the “Voices” section of the Baptist Standard. I sought to answer some of the questions that have arisen. I am also addressing these in my weekly updates. Perhaps you read the article or read my weekly updates. I have also addressed these in past executive board meetings.

I will share an update with the messengers at our annual meeting in Abilene. We will also have a breakout where our design team will share information and where we will receive input from participants.

How is the current GC2 Strong initiative different from previous GC2 emphases?

We are seeking fresh direction as we build on the same biblical principles. Christ has given us the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. These become timeless constants to us.



When GC2 was first conceptualized by former leadership, there was a desire to celebrate the comprehensive ministry of our convention. The work of affiliated churches and affiliated and related institutions shows love in practical ways while also sharing Christ and making disciples.

GC2 also provided a way to relate to churches and ministries beyond Texas. While the intention was not to pursue an “expansion,” it recognized the churches and ministries that desired to cooperate with the BGCT.

The current GC2 Strong initiative seeks to serve all affiliated churches. We are seeking to strengthen a multiplying movement of churches that live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in Texas and beyond.

The problem we want to address is lostness. Over half of the population in Texas does not know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Texas is more ethnically diverse than ever before. A great number of our churches are declining, and some are closing their doors. Yet more people need Christ!

In other words, our focus is serving local churches, most of which are in Texas. We believe that if we have strong churches, strong ministers, and strong missions partnerships, empowered by God’s Spirit, we can address the lostness in Texas and beyond.

Some have asked, “don’t we already have centers that address church health, ministerial health and missions?” The answer is “yes.” Our desire is to align all we do along those three so that we can have a more laser focus strategy with a deeper impact.

Is GC2 an effort for BGCT to become a national convention as an alternative to the SBC?

The simple answer is “no.” We don’t want to be a national convention. We don’t need another national convention. We also don’t desire to compete with the SBC or any other Baptist body. There is too much lostness in the state, the country, and the world to think in terms of “competition.”

It is important to remember that Texas Baptists is not an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention, though we celebrate our 138-year history of cooperating with it. Texas Baptists is an agency of Texas Baptists churches. The local church is the headquarters of our ministry. Thus, we respect the local churches’ freedom to choose with whom they cooperate for the cause of missions within the Baptist family.





While the autonomy of the local church has been a long-held principle among Baptists, there was a day when churches neatly related geographically with their local association, state convention, and national convention. While I liked the simplicity and efficiency of those days, not all churches follow this pattern today.

Some churches relate to a local association that is in a different part of the state. Some bypass the association and relate only to the state convention and the national convention. Yet others relate to two state conventions or two national conventions, including many of our ethnic churches. Some only relate to the local association and the state convention.

Historically, many, if not most, of our Texas Baptist churches are also affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. We respect the freedom of churches in directing their Cooperative Program contributions. Some follow the 79% BGCT 21% SBC adopted plan. Some give a lower percentage to BGCT and a higher percentage to SBC. And yet others give 100% to BGCT.

Texas Baptists has working agreements with NAMB for church planting in Texas and in North America, and it has a working agreement with the IMB that includes our Baptist Student Ministry GoNow Missions and our MAP missionaries. Additionally, we have a partnership with the Baptist World Alliance for work with other national Baptist conventions globally.

While we are not trying to become a national convention, we do acknowledge that our footprint has been larger than Texas for quite some time. Churches outside of Texas have affiliated with BGCT since the 1970s. Approximately half of the 70 churches outside of Texas that are affiliated with Texas Baptists are churches that were started by churches in Texas.

Even so, we do not have an expansion agenda or strategy for recruiting more churches outside of Texas. Our “expansion” strategy is to serve our existing churches as they reach the lost in their communities and around the world. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission belong to them.

We have had partnerships with national Baptist conventions for decades as we seek to live out Acts 1:8. Being witnesses in our Jerusalem, our Judea, our Samaria, and the ends of the earth is the responsibility of every believer, every church, every association, and every convention.

Living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission do not naturally lead to our trying to work in isolation or competition with others. On the contrary, the urgency





and immensity of the task call for greater cooperation with all those who are like-minded and resonate with our biblical convictions.

Are we pursuing cooperation in missions at the expense of doctrinal soundness?

Texas Baptists exist for the purpose of cooperating for missions. Together, we can do more than any church or Christian organization can do by itself. The Great Commandment and Great Commission task call for a big tent.

So how big can the tent be? Where do we drive the stakes? The answer is doctrinal affinity.

While we cherish the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church, we choose to cooperate with those who hold to orthodox Christian doctrine and historic Baptist principles.

Doctrinal affinity is not the same as doctrinal uniformity. While there are Christian doctrines and Baptist principles that are non-negotiable, there are beliefs and practices where local churches have freedom. It is enough for a church to hold to Christian orthodoxy and historical Baptist principles in order to collaborate with Texas Baptists for the cause of missions.

A few years ago, the executive board approved the GC2 summary of faith, which was also approved and amended by the messengers to the 2021 annual meeting in Galveston. This summary was not intended to replace any statement of faith, but to express in a summary fashion the essentials for cooperation.

Because we are a big-tent convention, some believe the 1963 statement is controversial. Others feel that the 2000 statement is controversial. The GC2 summary was an attempt to remove some of this stigma while still communicating that we are a centrist convention. Ironically, it became controversial, too. That is why it is not presently being emphasized.

Statements of faith have been the focus of controversy for the last 40 years or so. In my opinion, while some of the concerns have been legitimate, much of the fighting has distracted us from what Christ has commanded us to do: love God, love people, and make disciples. The doctrinal controversies of the late 20th century led us to forget “Bold Mission Thrust.”

Regardless of the version of these declarations, none of them is inspired, infallible, or inerrant. The only inspired, authoritative, infallible, and reliable guide for faith and practice is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.





That is why we do not impose any single version of The Baptist Faith and Message on our churches. It is enough for a church to affirm either the 1925, the 1963, the 2000, or a similar Baptist statement of faith in order to work together for the sake of the lost. After all, the Bible is our final authority.

Doctrinal soundness is important. Doctrinal affinity is necessary. Doctrinal uniformity distracts us from the mission of God.

Invitation to board members, messengers and churches:

As we address the lostness in our state, we need a GC2 awakening. While not all churches may initially enter the GC2 process, all churches can be involved in seeking a GC2 awakening. I will invite messengers to considering engaging in three ways:

1. **Prayer:** Praying for neighbors by name (December or January); Praying with a prayer resource around common themes from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday 2026. I am meeting with some pastors, leaders and staff to talk about increasing our prayer involvement across our Texas Baptists family.
2. **Giving:** Consider continuing and perhaps increasing their giving through the Cooperative Program. Percentage giving continues to be the best way we can cooperate together. Our CP giving has been declining for over a decade. We need to turn that around if we are going to reach our state.
3. **Living Out GC2:** Consider how each church can grow in living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission for the sake of those who do not know Christ in Texas and beyond.

Revision of Bylaws

Two more items I would like to mention before concluding my report. In the next few months I would like to enlist a Task Force that will take a look at our bylaws and bring some recommendations to this board in order to make necessary updates.

One of those areas that needs attention is to have greater clarity on what it means to be an affiliated church. What is the onboarding process? How do out of state churches relate to us? What is the level and frequency of giving that constitutes a cooperating church? What churches qualify to send messengers to the annual meeting, how many, and what is the formula or criteria for it? Affiliation and cooperation should mean something. Those who make decisions about our convention should be invested in our convention.

You should receive an update on this matter by our February meeting next year.



Insurance program for our churches

We are very excited about the progress we are making in regard to providing affordable property & casualty insurance, as well as liability insurance to our churches. Dr. Ward Hayes, along with Dr. Craig Christina has been working very hard on this. You will hear a report on that tomorrow. God has really blessed this effort and it will be a blessing to our churches!

I leave you with a portion of Jesus' priestly prayer. As he concluded his intercession for the disciples he was leaving behind, he lifted up the following,

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

Isn't it so great to know that Jesus prayed for us on that occasion. He prayed for you and me. He prayed for Texas Baptists, "those who will believe in me through their message...that they maybe one as we are one."

Amen?

Do you have any questions?

