



**1—Project Name:** Truett Certificate Program

**2—If this grant is being requested on behalf of an external organization, what is that organization's name and connection with Texas Baptists?** N/A

**3—Please request the minimum amount needed—with a maximum of \$20,000 possible—in order to accomplish the project's goals.**

\$20,000.00 (*budget attached*)

**4—Overview: Give a one paragraph description of the project.**

The Certificate Program offered through Baylor's Truett Seminary seeks to provide the highest quality non-academic ministry education and preparation possible within the narrow margins of time and finances common to laypeople, bi-vocational church leaders, and other ministers. It has a carefully designed program to provide formal theological education with an emphasis on the two criteria that Certificate Students say are most important: affordability and flexibility. Within the limitations that these two criteria create, the continued goal is to provide the absolute best content and experience for Certificate Students and to be the "gold standard" for non-academic online theological education and ministry preparation.

**5—STRATEGIC: How will this project make Texas Baptists stronger?**

The culture of theological education has long emphasized the rigorous upper levels of academic seminary study through the pursuit of graduate degrees. This has served to create many fine ministers, and a Master of Divinity is rightfully the gold standard for ministry education and preparation. However, the future and present of the local church are filled with more and more second-career ministers and more lay-led ministries. Master's degrees will still be the norm for many, but more and more, there is a need for theological education that falls "between Sunday School and Seminary." It is this level of education that Truett Seminary provides to benefit existing and future church leaders and ministers.

In seeking to reach this broad and diverse demographic, Truett seeks to maximize value for those who do not see theological education as preparation for a "career" in ministry and are deterred by the tuition costs and calendar commitments that come with traditional academic approaches. Despite all the best efforts to offer the most affordable educational option, Truett finds that there are significant unmet needs due to a simple lack of funding. Due to the lower socioeconomic status of many laypeople and bi-vocational ministers, even the very modest \$250 per course cost of Truett's Certificate Program is often still out of reach.

Providing access to theological education in this way will strengthen the present and future leaders of local congregations and improve their denominational ties and ministry skills.

## **6—SIGNIFICANT: What is the anticipated long-term impact of this project?**

Given the financial needs of Certificate Students, it is advantageous for support from the TBMF to continue providing scholarship assistance to offset the Certificate Program cost. Truett would like to continue providing the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation Scholarship of \$125 per course for Certificate Students who fit the following criteria:

Any minister (volunteer or vocational) with expressed financial hardship

This scholarship fund would allow those most in need of theological education to participate in Truett's Certificate Program at a level closest to their financial ability.

With the continuation of the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation Scholarship, Truett will be able to continue to draw in new students for whom the financial cost would otherwise be prohibitive. Truett will also be able to continue to serve in the upcoming year those who are already receiving this scholarship. A course cost that is subsidized with a 50% scholarship brings theological education within reach of those who are most in need of ministry preparation.

## **7—SUSTAINABLE: How will the grant help this project become self-supporting?**

Truett Seminary is committed to serving the local church through ministry formation and education. The theological education provided by the Certificate Program is needed for the future leadership of many smaller churches and for the support of existing churches. This program has reached sustainability within the seminary, but affordable access to this type of learning is still a significant challenge. The ongoing provision of this grant funding allows scholarships that allow continuing participation to be sustainable for the ministers in the Certificate Program.

## **8—INNOVATIVE: How will this project break new ground?**

Now in its 21st year (10 years in the present format), the Truett Certificate Program continues to offer a uniquely distinct approach to non-academic theological education. Where other institutions' non-degree options are often limited by geography, Truett's Certificate Program can serve the entire state and beyond. Similarly, many other organizations offer non-degree digitally delivered education using pre-recorded videos that are hindered by the inherent limitations of a passive learning format. Our blend of weekly reading assignments, short written assignments, personal assessment/feedback, and fully-featured supplementary content allows us to actively engage students in an asynchronous format that aims to maintain personal connections while engaging in formational education for faith and ministry.

Innovations for the upcoming year are numerous as we continue to improve our current curriculum and adjust to ongoing feedback from students in order to create a more successful path of learning, and continue with optional synchronous weekly video instruction sessions to expand the efficacy of our Scripture courses. Additionally, with the approval and support of the BGCT Chaplaincy Relations department, Dr. Eric Whitmore (formerly with the BGCT) and I have written a new online course for Volunteer Chaplaincy training that is in the queue for a course designer from Baylor University to give it a permanent home for the recently dormant BGCT curriculum known as Hands on Ministry. This course will train volunteer chaplains

associated with the BGCT, as well as the BGAV, and will reach far beyond these geographical areas as well.

Similarly, the Truett Certificate Program continues our joint partnerships with the BGCT certificate-level discipleship programs for Youth Discipleship and Children's Discipleship. Additionally, we continue to offer certificates in humanitarian aid in collaboration with the Baptist World Alliance, allowing for collaborative work to bring theological education, personal formation, and ministry affirmation to hundreds of students in Texas and beyond.

### **9—INVOLVING: How will the churches served by Texas Baptists be included in this project?**

According to studies by Duke University and others, the average size of protestant congregations in the United States is less than 75. In Texas, a large number of churches of this size are served by bi-vocational (partially-funded) pastors, and even more have partially-funded or non-funded ministers in other roles (Sr. Adults, Youth, Children, etc.). In the many rural areas of Texas, it is commonplace for these ministers and leaders not to have any formal theological education. Likewise, due to church financial limitations, it is commonplace for these volunteer ministers to be in charge of the various ministry areas of the church. For these "volunteer" ministers and leaders, even the most affordable ministry education is often financially out of reach.

Additionally, we have established partnerships with South Main Baptist in Houston and Sugar Land Baptist Church with the effective model of congregational cohorts of Certificate Students that are facilitated by the church's ministry staff. Both of these churches are demonstrating the potential of local-church partnerships for the education and formation of their lay leaders and teachers.

In summary, Truett has identified large needs for theological education within the Church that have been traditionally undermet and designed the Certificate Program to serve these needs in every possible way, but the financial hurdle is the primary one with which these students need assistance.

**How many churches will be involved?** 150+

### **10—INTERESTING: How will this project produce helpful stories and encourage donor engagement for future ministry support?**

Upon the completion of each course, a Certificate Student is given an optional prompt to write a reflection/recommendation for that course, along with a question on whether it would be permitted to identify that student by name. Most students answer this prompt with glowing recommendations, and nearly all give permission for those words to be shared. Some of these reflections are such an inspiring blessing that they are forwarded to the entire Certificate Team and leadership at Truett Seminary. It would be a simple matter to include one or more other email addresses in these semi-regular emails or to collate them into a regular report.

Likewise, if there is a desire to provide letters of thanks to one or more donors, then it would be easy to create a process to request or require Certificate Students to write such letters. If this direction is desired, then I would recommend that it might be best for Truett to request those letters from specific Certificate Students in order to provide donors with a select few letters that are of higher quality.

**11—Has this project received previous TBMF grants? If YES, list years and amounts.**

The Texas Baptist Missions Foundation provided a \$17,000 grant for 2019 and \$20,000 for 2020-2025. This request is for that gift to be continued in 2026.

Of the 2024 funds, we have awarded about half, and based on present demand, we anticipate that, like in 2018-2023, this fund will be depleted before the end of the year.

**12—Is this request for an ongoing project with a new name? If YES, what was the former name of the project?**

N/A

<b>Truett Certificate Program Budget 2024-2025</b>		
<b>Account</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Budget</b>
5499	Restricted Gifts/Grants	19,600
5880	Miscellaneous Revenue	102,501
	<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>122,101.00</b>
9120	<b>Full Time Regular Employee</b>	<b>76,686</b>
9190	Budget Fringe Benefits	21,119
9200	Student Wage Rollup Account	103
9240	Seminary Teaching Assistant	21,000
9315	Software Licensing	360
9340	Honorarium & Professional Fees	600
9342	Guests & Entertainment	2,000
9359	Postage	300
9367	Recruiting Students	1,000
9369	Bank/Credit Card Fees	25
9370	Supplies	750
9372	Printing	2,000
9376	Telephone Expense	750
9382	Travel - Faculty/Staff	3,500
9399	Miscellaneous Oper Exp	5,804
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>135,997</b>