

A Rancher's Rumbings, June 26, 2009
SHARING IS HEALTHY AND CHRISTIAN

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Let me begin by giving you a report from Desperado Ranch, since so many of you have been mentioning it to me at church or emailing to tell me how much you're enjoying the "goat stories." Desperado Ranch is where Loretta and I have built our new home. It's named, of course, for *The Eagles'* song of that name, which will be played at my funeral someday.

Desperado Ranch covers 497 acres, 12 miles south of San Angelo. We have 21 cows; 2 bulls; 65 goats – including 60 nanny goats (females) and 5 billy goats (males); 1 donkey named Shanna (in "honor" of my daughter-in-law – some of you fathers-in-law will probably understand); and, finally, a llama named Ret, after Loretta, because she is so stubborn (!!!!! it's okay, Loretta understands). The llama and the donkey are there to guard the goats against coyotes and bobcats.

We recently changed pastures (we have only two pastures) with the goats and are rebuilding about 100 yards of fence next to the other pasture to isolate all of the animals from the yard, but the rebuilding isn't yet finished. The llama was not around to move; this morning, I looked out the bathroom window to see her enthusiastically eating our 1-month growth of lawn. We tried to move her through the gates with the goats, and umm, she was very Loretta-like, too stubborn to go – it appears that she likes fresh new grass.

Last night, we counted 7 new kid goats since Lost and Found were born. A few weeks ago, Chad and I put number tags in the nannies' ears so that I could identify the ones who have babies and how many survive, etc. Sad to say, #47 will soon be sold – she had twins, and we found both of them dead. But #30 is now a very special goat, as she is doing a beautiful job of raising Lost and Found.

Two others had twins, only one of which survived – but that is simply nature at work. They get to stay.

Snowflake – whom we raised on a bottle about 5 years ago – has a new all-white baby boy, 2 days old as I write this, already named Snowy by our granddaughter, which means that he will get to live his life with us, along with Blackie – the billy goat we raised on a bottle 5 years ago, who is jet black. We are also going to keep one billy kid we have named Chief because he is majestic in appearance. He holds his head high, and he has a white body and a brown head trimmed out beautifully in black. His head looks like a gorgeous Indian headdress.

Since you need only three boys for every 20 girls, the older billy goats now look at me with great disdain, realizing that they are going to have to share a great deal more. Of course, they do not gripe too much – I think that's because they know they get sold and eaten if they do not share appropriately.

You see, sharing is a way of life on a ranch – sharing makes everyone stronger. For some, sharing is even a way of surviving.

That's the way it is for Texas Baptists, too.

I am not sure that very many people realize how committed TBC has been to sharing through the years. We realize that there are many Texas Baptists who do not agree with TBC in part or much at all yet still support the BGCT. We realize that CBF receives strong support from more churches in the BGCT than in any other state convention but that there are also many churches in the BGCT who still support the Southern Baptist Convention. TBC is committed to the freedom of the local church to make those choices – whether or not we agree with their choices.

We realize that the BGCT is unique in having many more ethnic churches than any other state Baptist convention.

We understand that many churches – including the church of which I am a member – respect the call of women by God to full-time Christian ministry.

It was in this spirit that, in the past 6 years, TBC endorsed – and Texas Baptists elected – a woman president, an African American president, and a Hispanic president. One day I will go to my grave in Paint Rock, very proud of Texas Baptists for doing this and proud of TBC for leading the way.

Last year, TBC decided to not endorse candidates for BGCT office, because some people had expressed a perception that we were “controlling” the process. Although we at TBC never intended to exercise any control over the process, I understood this perception, and I agreed with the decision to not endorse any candidates.

But now I have a huge concern about this decision. Without TBC’s leadership, will the BGCT continue to share, or will we get into combative elections between churches that support SBC ministries vs. persons who support CBF ministries vs. persons who are mostly just Texas-focused? And will there still be a place of leadership for women, as well as people from minority ethnic groups?

Friends, the key to our unity in the future is SHARED leadership. Will this happen without TBC leading the way through endorsements? I hope so, but it scares me that we could easily get divided after coming so far as a state convention. We could wind up right back where we started, with all of our leaders coming from one group, and with minorities and women being left out. Shared leadership doesn’t just happen – it has to be intentional. That’s where TBC’s leadership has made a difference in recent years – by providing an intentional plan to share leadership.

We have a rare jewel in the Baptist General Convention of Texas. But other once-great conventions and organizations have declined through a spirit of narrowness and exclusion. It can happen to the BGCT as well, if we fail to support and intentionally work toward shared leadership, including Texas Baptists of all perspectives and ethnic groups and women.

The choice is ours to make. I pray that we make wise choices.