

THE BGCT AND BIBLE STUDY LITERATURE

Texas Baptists are people of the Book. They believe that God's people develop in Christian discipleship through the study of God's Word. And they believe that churches are God's chosen vehicles for making and maturing disciples of Jesus.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas exists to "encourage and assist churches" in the task of "fulfilling the Great Commission." In keeping with that commitment, the BGCT has a long history of producing materials for churches. The convention has developed resources such as evangelistic lessons, Sunday School curriculum for Bible study in language and ethnic congregations, Sunday School/Discipleship training videos, stewardship manuals, witness training guides, ethical issues resources, and other materials.

Messengers to the 1997 annual session of the BGCT in Austin approved the following committee recommendation:

"That literature and other resources for Sunday School Discipleship Training, missions organizations and other Bible study groups be developed as either a supplement to existing materials or a substitute for existing materials for those who so choose. These materials will provide information on Baptist missions (with a special emphasis on Texas Baptist missions), Baptist distinctives, stewardship, ethics, and other subjects. These materials ought to be delivered to churches through appropriate channels as inexpensively and as soon as possible. These should be produced as soon as is prudent."

Bernie Spooner, director of the BGCT Sunday School/Discipleship Division, was selected as chairman of the curriculum work group charged with the responsibility of developing the Bible study materials. The materials will be different from any currently available in that they will be undated, deal with Bible books, and provide information on the challenge of the Texas, national, and worldwide mission fields and on BGCT resources to help meet that challenge. The materials will be written by Texas Baptists and will focus on Baptist principles, polity, and beliefs.

The BGCT retained the services of a consultant in curriculum development to help design *BaptistWay: Bible Study for Texas*, and Texas Baptists will be enlisted to write the content. The BGCT Administrative Committee voted to affirm proceeding with these materials with the understanding that no Cooperative Program funds would be used and that they become self-supporting as soon as possible. The BGCT is not establishing a "publishing house" to prepare the curriculum. Existing staff members are directing the production of the materials. The undated materials will be produced quarterly, but they may be used and reused at any time. Teachers and pupils will use the same publication, but a separate supplement with teaching procedures will be available. The first lessons are expected to be available for the March/April/May quarter in 2000.

Churches, of course, would be free to use the material as a supplement to other curriculum, to use it as a substitute for other resources, or to not use it at all. That is the same freedom the Baptist Sunday School Board – now LifeWay Christian Resources – recognized from its beginning in the 1890s. In 1891, a special committee recommended to the Southern Baptist Convention that a new Sunday School Board be created. The committee's report included the recommendation "that

the fullest freedom of choice be accorded to every one as to what literature he will use or support, and that no brother be disparaged in the slightest degree on account of what he may do in the exercise of his right as Christ's freeman."

Baptist churches continue to exercise that freedom. LifeWay Christian Resources reports that 20 percent of Texas Baptist churches do not use their materials. Many of them use non-Baptist curriculum. *BaptistWay: Bible Study for Texas* will offer churches an additional option to consider. The BGCT goal in producing the Bible study curriculum is to help churches accomplish their mission, providing new materials that:

- Lift up Jesus Christ
- Focus on the challenges and opportunities of reaching the Texas mission field
- Strengthen the mission base to help reach a lost world with the gospel
- Highlight Baptist heritage, polity, and doctrine