

## THE BGCT AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Texas is a great and diverse mission field. As Texas Baptists respond to the need to “develop Great Commission churches for all persons,” there is an especially critical need for trained ethnic and bivocational pastors in all parts of the state.

The theological education initiatives such as those recommended by the Theological Education Committee are intended to **complement**, and not **duplicate**, present opportunities for theological education in Texas. Texas Baptists have enjoyed a longstanding positive relationship with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which was founded by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and there is no intent for this cooperative spirit to change.

However, Texas is in and of itself a great mission field. If Texas Baptists are serious in regard to sharing Jesus with every person and establishing Great Commission churches for all persons, they must complement traditional graduate-level, resident theological programs with other opportunities for training.

The Theological Education Committee works to encourage and facilitate a statewide network of theological education endeavors. Some of this network will build upon ministry education already being offered through the BGCT-related educational institutions.

The area of theological education is also involved in developing basic, entry-level theological education for Texas Baptists. Key characteristics of this delivery system will be accessibility (geographically and technologically), transferability, and equivalency (work accepted by other schools). At least one Texas Baptist university is working in this direction and serves as a pilot project.

These concepts – in concert with other quality programs offering diplomas, certificates, or continuing education credits – would allow and even encourage many Texas Baptists to pursue theological training who currently do not have the means or opportunity to do so.

Texas Baptist universities have always had, as a part of their mission, the training of ministers as well as lay leaders. Several of these schools have long offered graduate degrees in Bible or religion, and it is only natural that two of our schools have expanded this ministry to include graduate schools of theology. These programs feature smaller classes, personal mentoring and spiritual development, and are situated within the interdisciplinary setting of a university. Thus, even these graduate schools are unique in their approach when compared to the traditional SBC seminary, offering an additional and complementary avenue of theological training to students.

There is no doubt about the need in Texas for new opportunities in theological training. **With the resources God has given us, Texas Baptists through the BGCT have a unique opportunity to make theological education and training at all levels accessible and meaningful to the greatest number of people possible.**