

TEXAS BAPTISTS COMMITTED
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Several years ago, David R. Currie, then executive director of Texas Baptists Committed, wrote the following memo, addressed to pastor search committees. Dr. Currie served Texas Baptists Committed faithfully in this role for 22 years; this memo is based on his extensive experience in aiding churches searching for a new pastor and in dealing with the fallout from the Fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention.

MEMO TO PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEES by David R. Currie

As Executive Director of Texas Baptists Committed, I agonize when I receive a call from a layperson whose church is in turmoil because they are a traditional Baptist church that has called a Fundamentalist pastor. The stories are often similar. They tell our office that the committees of their church have been dismissed; business meetings have been abolished; Sunday School teachers are being required to sign statements pledging their loyalty to the pastor as the authority over the church; and they are having to listen to sermons claiming that the Baptist General Convention of Texas has leaders who are liberals who do not believe the Bible, and who support homosexuality and abortion – all of which they know is not true.

When I ask how the church called such a pastor, the answers are also similar. I am told that the church wanted to avoid “all the politics” going on and called a man who told them he was neutral about all this mess. The church was misled.

According to our records, your church is without a pastor. If our records are wrong, we apologize. There are 6,000 churches and missions in Texas, and it is hard to keep our information current. Please keep the enclosed material if it is helpful and accept our apology.

If your church is without a pastor, you face the most important challenge in the life of your church at this time. You want a united church, one focused on Jesus Christ and one growing in both numbers and ministries. You don't want to be involved in all the politics. You want a fellowship of peace and love. What can you do?

Avoid the three mistakes most commonly made by search committees today.

Mistake #1: Do not pretend the last 20 years of conflict in Baptist life has not happened. The Southern Baptist Convention was taken over by Fundamentalists. Russell Dilday and Keith Parks were fired. The six SBC seminaries are very different than before, and – to counter the Fundamentalism of the SBC seminaries – new seminaries were established at Baylor and Hardin-Simmons.

The SBC mission programs are also different now that they are controlled by Fundamentalists, so the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was formed.

Texas has a new Fundamentalist convention called the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. They want you to stop being a part of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and join them. All of this is reality.

Any potential pastor you may interview has an opinion about all this, and you need to know what that opinion is. You also need to know who your church is. If you support Fundamentalism, call a Fundamentalist pastor. If you are a traditional Baptist church, make sure you call a mainstream-type pastor who will be a servant leader, not a dictator.

If you do not know what Fundamentalism is, learn about it. Know what you are dealing with. Make sure you understand historic Baptist principles. Do you believe in local church autonomy? Do you believe in the priesthood of all believers? Do you believe the Bible is the authority in all

matters of faith and practice? Do you believe in religious liberty for everyone? If so, call a pastor who also believes in these principles.

Mistake #2: Do not confuse politics with theology. You say you want to stay out of the politics, but please realize that most of the argument in Baptist life the past 20 years is not about politics but theology. My cousin, W. A. Criswell, says that the pastor is the “ruler” of the church. My understanding of Scripture is that the pastor is the servant-leader of the church. That is not a political difference as much as it is a theological difference. Which member of my family do you agree with? Do you know the differences?

The Baptist principles I mentioned are “theological” principles, not political principles. Finding out whether a potential pastor is a traditional Baptist is not a political question but a theological question. What does the candidate believe? Is he/she a real Baptist or an Independent Fundamental Baptist – like Jerry Falwell? Falwell sees himself as the ruler of the church, disagrees with most historic Baptist principles, and believes the Southern Baptist Convention has the right to dictate to you what you can believe.

Mistake #3: Do not assume your church will never have to deal with what has happened the past 20 years. You will. It is inevitable. Why? Because every church faces a stewardship question. That question is: “What do we do with God’s money?”

You are a Baptist church. That means you believe everyone needs Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior. You believe in sending missionaries around the world to tell people about Jesus. You believe in supporting Baptist universities and seminaries. You believe in supporting Baptist child care ministries and retirement homes like Buckner Benevolences and Baptist Memorials, and you believe in Baptist hospitals. These ministries are all possible because you give God’s money to support these ministries.

Because of the past 20 years, the ministries and agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention have changed, whereas those of the Baptist General Convention of Texas have remained mainstream – true to historic Baptist principles. You will someday have to decide what to do with God’s money through your Cooperative Program giving. An example is seminary education. Baylor and Hardin-Simmons have both started new seminaries, because Fundamentalists control the SBC seminaries. At SBC seminaries, the students are being taught that the pastor is the ruler of the church, that religious liberty is for Christians only, etc. Do you support that? Do you want a pastor who believes those things?

If you do not, you are going to have to decide – in order to be a good steward – where to send your money: either to seminaries who teach these nonBaptist principles or to traditional seminaries that teach historic Baptist doctrines. Sooner or later, you will have to choose. And remember – when you choose, you are making *not* a political decision but a theological decision.

I could say more, but I don’t want to do so unless you ask for my help. We are enclosing several articles and books that can be very helpful. TBC urges you to share them with members of your committee. My prayer is for you to make a good decision. If TBC can help in any way, please call on us!