



General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Inc.

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HAYWOOD T. GRAY COMPLETES TEN YEARS AS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY-TREASURER

In a meeting of the Executive Committee of the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Inc., held on Monday, November 15, 2004 at Martin Street Baptist Church in Raleigh, Haywood T. Gray was (s)electd as the tenth Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Convention. He completes ten years in that office on November 15, 2014. The *Baptist Bulletin* posed some questions to him on the occasion of his tenth anniversary in the office.

Q: Do you remember that day ten years ago?

A. I remember it as if it were yesterday. It was a beautiful, crisp, cool fall day in Raleigh. I had come from High Point to a meeting where I was to be named Executive Secretary-Treasurer, but I was as afraid as I had ever been in my entire life. I kept thinking "They will change their minds and how am I going to explain that to my family and friends." I was given a room to wait while the deliberations were going on, but I was too nervous. I spent the time outside pacing in the Martin Street parking lot. Most of that time was spent trying to figure out how to gracefully escape. After what seemed to be an eternity, the late Dr. J. C.

Harris came outside looking for me. When he found me at my car (with keys in hand), he showed a wide grin and said, "We're waiting on you inside, Mr. Secretary." I thought I could finally breathe again.

Q: What was the status of the Convention then?

It was not good. I am not sure that anyone truly knew the depth of our despair as a Convention at that time. I certainly did not know.

The Convention had debt in excess of \$2.7 million dollars, the contribution base had shrunk to less than \$500,000.00 in income a year, and almost everyone everywhere was speaking about the imminent demise of the Convention. Not only were we financially in trouble, but the attendance and participation was at near record low levels. There was clear division in the Convention surrounding the circumstances of my predecessor's departure. There was general feeling of mistrust and malaise.

Q: What was the first year like?

A: Rough. We had all but lost the confidence of our larger churches and major donors. Creditors were calling everyday. On my first day, I found out that we had 19 bank accounts and a combined total



Haywood T. Gray has served as Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Inc. since Monday, November 15, 2004.

of less than \$7,900.00 in the accounts combined.

Q: What was your strategy?

A: Actually, there wasn't much of a strategy. Practically everyone had given up and was planning GBSC's funer-

al. I had to keep things moving until things got better. We just didn't know when or if it would get better. I knew that we had to regain the confidence of our donors so we implemented several policies to provide transparency and accounta-

bility. An austerity plan was put into place that was draconian in some regards.

Q: What were some features of the austerity plan?

A: First, I thought it important to cut operating expenses which I reduced by more than half a million dollars in the first year. That was followed by severe cuts in staffing. We went from seventeen full and part-time staff positions when I arrived to five. Then we starting chipping away at our debts little by little.

Q: It seems like there were lots of sacrifices made. What were some of them?

A: You are right about the sacrifices. Some people lost their jobs and many vendors had to wait for us to settle our debts. I went eight months (January to August) without drawing a regular paycheck. In order to continue the Convention's operations, I used my personal credit to operate. At one point, I was not getting paid and was in over \$40,000.00 in credit card debt.

Q: What turned things around?

There was a large commitment on the part of a small core of churches and pastors who were just determined not to let the Convention die. Little by little, church by church, pastor by pastor confidence began to return and support grew.

Q: What was your long range plan for the Convention?

Just to survive! Those days were tough. I had reasoned that the Convention's debt would be satisfied in seven or eight years and the Convention would be on fiscal solid footing in ten years. In my interview, I was asked, if employed, would I make a commitment to stay with the Convention. I said that I would be willing to commit to staying ten years to see things stabilized.

Q: And how did your plan turn out?

Pretty well, I guess. The Convention satisfied all its debt on August 31, 2008. What I initially thought would take seven to eight years was accomplished in three.

The Convention has operated debt free since August 2008.

Q: So what did you do to turn things around?

I suspect that it had very little to do with me. I have been fortunate to work with four very strong leaders in the Presidents under which I have served. Our strong presidential leadership coupled with the phenomenal abilities and commitment of our Vice Presidents and General Board members has been the key to our successes.

Q: Do you regret leaving the pastorate for denominational leadership?

I was a pastor for twenty-four years and there are days that I miss it very much. But I see a means of serving Christ in this way and I am happy to do so. While I don't necessarily miss the work of being a pastor, I do miss the opportunity to work with people and become involved in their lives and their faith journey.

Q: What's the hardest part of the job?

Definitely fundraising. It is getting harder and harder to raise money for missions. I suspect that we might do better if we had some gimmick, but it's unfortunate that giving to missions for missions sake isn't as popular an idea as it once was. However, the hardest part of the job (fundraising) is also the most satisfying part of the job. When I sign a check to one of our objectives for missions, it feels so good to know that we are making a difference in the lives of people whether at Shaw, at the Children's Home or through Lott Carey.

Q: What do you think the next ten years of your service will be like?

Honestly, I don't see another ten years for me. This is a very high stress and very demanding position where burnout is high. The Convention has mandatory retirement and I hope that they will put up with me until I get close. They have shown amazing grace to put up with me so far. I am grateful.

Q: What do you think are the large challenges for the future of the Convention are?

Without question, we are going to have to better embrace technology and the digital age. It's clear that young Baptists don't place the same emphasis on brick and mortar and the printed page as my generation did. We are going to have to connect better with the next generation to serve their unique spiritual and faith needs. We are running a bit behind the curve with that.

Q: What are the large challenges of the present?

Trying to run so large an organization with such a small staff is a definite problem. Currently the Convention has only three fulltime people. The need for a more modern headquarters facility and the future of the Baptist Assembly both keep me up at night.

Q: What has been your most significant accomplishment?

Definitely the opportunity to mentor and help younger pastors and ministers find their places in ministry and service. That's probably the thing that I'd liked to be remembered for.

Q: How did you get so committed to missions?

My first General Baptist Convention was in 1982, the same year that the late Dr. E. B. Turner came to the Presidency. For some strange reason, Dr. Turner took an interest in me. I guess I must have been the most pitiful young pastor he'd ever seen. He advocated for me and other young pastors and opened doors for our involvement in the Convention. He taught me much of what I know about Baptist life in North Carolina and he had this amazing confidence in what I might one day become. He was more convinced that I would make something of myself

than I was.

Q: Tell us something that we probably don't know about you?

I am a very simple person and I enjoy the simple things in life. If my doctors would let me, I'd eat a fried bologna sandwich every day. My favorite fun thing is putt-putt golf. I am way horrible at it too, but I enjoy getting really tickled at how bad I am. I love fast cars and nice pens. I believe that there is merit in laughter and in tears — laughter in abundance and tears in moderation, but both clean the heart and the soul.

Q: So how do you plan to celebrate this milestone?

I think I will do something that I rarely do. I am planning to take a weekend off. Probably spend some family time, maybe see a movie and definitely get some sleep.

Q: Any final word on the occasion of your tenth anniversary?

Yes. I am fully aware that I probably should never have gotten this job in the first place. There were so many other people who were more qualified. I had never run a statewide anything and never handled millions of dollars. I'm embarrassed that I never finished my graduate education and I was so ill prepared for this marvelous opportunity. But I am grateful that the Convention gave me a chance. I certainly did not deserve that chance. I am also thankful that the Convention gave me the time to grow into the position and learn the job. I know I have made many, many more errors than I got things right. For my mistakes, I am sorry and there is no one to blame but me. Yet I have never forgotten the big risk that the Convention took in hiring me. While I have probably never met their expectations, I have really tried every day to reach higher and do better. I am humbled that they haven't yet given up on me.