

A Rancher's Ruminations, February 20, 2009

KEEPING THE BGCT INCLUSIVE

by David R. Currie

Executive Director, Texas Baptists Committed

Last Thursday evening, I attended the memorial service for Dr. Rudy Sanchez, a remarkable Texas Baptist leader and faithful friend of TBC. Rudy served on our Board for many years. He also served as a BGCT vice president and the first Hispanic chair of the BGCT Executive Board.

It was a very moving service – a special time to celebrate a wonderful man who lived a meaningful life spent investing himself in others.

For many years, Rudy was an integral part of TBC and what we accomplished, along with Noah Rodriguez, Rudy Camacho, and Albert Reyes. I consider all of these men giants – courageous, committed pillars of integrity and strength.

TBC has always been committed to highlighting, for Texas Baptists, the significant roles that minorities play in BGCT life. Through the years, we have pushed hard to make leadership roles available to women and members of minority groups – at both the convention officer level and the Executive Board level. I am proud of that effort, and I am proud of those who have served in those roles.

Participating in Rudy's memorial service, I found myself wondering how we can ensure that the BGCT continues to have strong minority participation and leadership, especially as convention officers, if TBC does not endorse candidates.

Last year, as our Board discussed the possibility of no longer endorsing candidates for BGCT office, one of the most persuasive arguments made for continuing to endorse was that it would be much more difficult to elect members of minority groups without a TBC endorsement.

In the end, we decided to stop endorsing in reaction to a concern of some Texas Baptists that we were not only endorsing candidates but *picking* them. These folks seemed to feel that, in some way, we were “controlling” the officer process – at a time that most Fundamentalist-leaning churches had joined the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, relieving us of the need to “pick” specific people.

I felt that these folks had a legitimate concern, and I urged our Board to no longer endorse a candidate, provided that all candidates clearly express their support of the BGCT and their opposition to Fundamentalism. Having said that, however, I strongly believe that the persons who have served Texas Baptists as officers – with TBC's endorsement – have been a remarkable, diverse, committed group of leaders. I am convinced that TBC did the right thing in endorsing these candidates.

As I think of Rudy Sanchez and how gifted and committed he was, I want to simply ask that, as Texas Baptists, we make sure that we honor the diversity of our make-up. We have over 1,200 Hispanic churches, over 800 African-American congregations, a growing number of Asian churches, as well as Cowboy churches. Let's agree to work hard to make sure that all are represented in key positions of leadership as a creative, inclusive BGCT. Our diversity makes us stronger. Diversity of leadership does, too.

When I think of Rudy Sanchez, I think mostly about how much he wanted a Baptist world in which everyone mattered. Rudy spent his life working for that reality. I am proud that he considered me his friend in that effort.