

Baylor to allow non-Baptists on governing board

by [Marv Knox](#)

February 14, 2011

DALLAS (ABP) -- The governing body of Baylor University, the world's largest Baptist academic institution, now may include Christians who are not Baptists.

Baylor's board of regents voted Feb. 11 to amend the university's bylaws, allowing members who are active in Christian -- but not Baptist -- churches to comprise up to 25 percent of the board.

The bylaws require 75 percent of the board to be Baptists, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas will continue to elect 25 percent of the overall board.

In steps Baylor leaders described as maintaining the Waco university's ties to the Baptist denomination, the regents also voted to create the Baptist Studies Center for Research and to increase the amount of financial aid available to children of Baptist ministers and missionaries.

Despite the change, Baylor will maintain its strong Baptist identity, regent Chairman Dary Stone of Dallas pledged.

"We have been for 166 years ... and always will be a Baptist university," Stone said. He cited creation of the Baptist center and increases in scholarships for Baptist ministers' and missionaries' children as examples of Baylor's faithfulness to Baptists.

But expanding regent qualifications to include non-Baptist Christians reflects

Baylor's large non-Baptist constituency, he added.

"Changing our governance is in great part an accommodation to obvious demographic changes in church labels and affiliation," he said. For example, the composition of the freshman class is slightly less than one-third Baptist, and the majority of the overall student body is non-Baptist.

"But we think the vast majority (of students) are very baptistic," even though many of their families attend churches that do not bear the Baptist name, he noted. Many non-Baptist students' families formerly attended Baptist churches, he acknowledged.

"First and foremost, our commitment is to the lordship of Jesus Christ," Stone said. "But the 'Baptist' label alone disqualifies many Baylor families" from representation on the regent board. "We're responsible to reach out and reclaim many people ... and many former Baptists."

Although some future non-Baptist regents may not have studied at Baylor, he predicted the vast majority of them will be chosen from among Baylor alumni.

BGCT executive staff leaders learned Feb. 9 the regents planned to consider changing the requirement that the university's entire governing board be Baptists.

"While we had heard throughout the fall that this was a possible consideration, this was the first official word we received," said Steve Vernon, associate executive director of the BGCT Executive Board.

"Based on the vote concerning a similar situation with Houston Baptist University taken at the annual meeting in McAllen, I wrote by e-mail to the Baylor board of regents to express our opposition to the move. The vote did not go as I believe Texas Baptists would desire."

Messengers at the annual meeting turned aside a BGCT Executive Board recommendation that the state convention revise its agreement with Houston Baptist University, allowing HBU to elect a minority of non-Baptist Christian trustees.

The Baylor regents' action "does not change the percentage of Baylor regents the BGCT elects," Vernon added. "Baylor is still a valued member of the Texas Baptist family."

Baylor receives about \$1.5 million a year in direct institutional support through the BGCT Cooperative Program, he reported. Including funds for ministerial student scholarships, the BGCT budget provides about \$2.8 million annually to Baylor. From 2000 to 2009, the BGCT provided more than \$26 million to the university.