

Houston Baptist University opens board to non-Baptists

by [Ken Camp](#)

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HOUSTON (ABP) -- Houston Baptist University trustees voted March 10 to allow non-Baptist Christians a minority presence on the school's governing board.

The move is designed to help HBU -- the only evangelical university in the city of Houston -- reach out to Christians of many denominations in the diverse city by providing them a voice on its governing board.

"As our nation's fourth-largest city, Houston is enormously diverse, but at the same time, it also has a rich Christian witness," said President Robert Sloan. "Cooperating in this way with the broad Christian community in the region is absolutely vital to fulfilling the University's mission."

At their regularly scheduled meeting in February, trustees discussed the issue of allowing up to nine non-Baptist trustees on the 36-member board and subsequently notified officials at the Baptist General Convention of Texas about their intention.

BGCT Associate Executive Director Steve Vernon, Executive Board Chair Debbie Ferrier and Chris Liebrum, director of the BGCT Education/Discipleship team, met in Houston with Sloan, other administration officials from the university and pastors from the HBU board of trustees Feb. 25 to discuss the matter.

HBU relates to the BGCT by a special agreement that allows the university to elect 75 percent of its own trustees, with the BGCT electing the remaining 25 percent. Under the terms of the agreement, all trustees HBU elects must be Baptist but not necessarily from

BGCT-affiliated churches. However, HBU can amend its bylaws by a 66 and two-thirds vote of the trustees, and BGCT approval is not required.

Trustees polled March 10 approved an amendment to allow up to one-third of the trustees elected by the university's governing board -- one-fourth of the total board -- to be "active members of non-Baptist Christian churches."

HBU trustees and the BGCT Executive Board had recommended that revised arrangement last fall, but messengers to the BGCT annual meeting in McAllen rejected it.

"Houston Baptist did not and does not need the permission of the BGCT to take this step. HBU went through the process last year as a matter of courtesy and as a way of discussion of the issue," Vernon noted in an e-mail to the BGCT Executive Board.

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

However, Vernon said, HBU officials insisted their intended action is not in reaction to the move by the Baylor regents.

"As I understand the process of HBU, this was a discussion that began after the annual meeting at their November 2010 board meeting," he said. "They assured us that it was in no way related to the Baylor University discussion. As with Baylor, this does not affect the 25 percent of the trustees that we elect by special agreement with Houston Baptist."

The proposed change also will not change HBU's commitment to its Baptist identity, Sloan said.

"We are a Baptist institution. We will remain a Baptist institution. That's who we are," he said.