

Jeff Box: Working with some of the most incredible people

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Jeff Box has been director of missions for the [Concho Valley Baptist Association](#) in San Angelo, Texas, since 2013. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you worked, and what were your positions?

- youth minister in Snyder, San Antonio, Canyon, and Borger, Texas
- BSU/BSM director at Frank Phillips College (Borger), Mountainview Community College (Dallas, while in Seminary), Paris Junior College/Northeast Texas Community College, Amarillo College, Wayland Baptist University
- interim pastorates in Amarillo (2) and Hart
- senior pastor at First Baptist in Monahans and Chapel Hill in Odessa

Where did you grow up?

I was born in San Angelo but my father joined the Air Force, and I spent time in Vermont, Washington, D.C., Germany, Okinawa, Japan, San Antonio, Texas and then moved back to San Angelo to live with my grandparents in my sophomore year of high school, graduating from Lake View High School in 1974

How did you come to faith in Christ?

You asked a complicated question.

My family was not religious at all. My father was an agnostic and disliked any religion.

I remember once when I was about seven or eight years old being dropped off at Vacation Bible School at Lackland Baptist Church in San Antonio because it was cheap babysitting. It lasted two weeks; I think the workers are still recovering! I remember memorizing all the books of the Bible and the scripture list they had, not because of what it taught me, but because I wanted more stars on my wall chart than anyone else.

The second week, the preacher made a plea each day for us to get "saved." I had no idea what that meant, but because I liked the preacher, I went down three times. The third time he told me to go sit down.

Seven or eight years later, while living in Okinawa, I suffered a serious leg injury that was originally misdiagnosed by the medics at our air base. The result was a staph infection on my right leg that led to massive blood poisoning. When it was discovered, I was rushed to an Army hospital on the other side of the island. The most seriously injured cases from Vietnam were sent there.

I spent 60 days in the hospital, during which time I turned 16 years old. My dad was told not to expect me to live, then that my right leg would be amputated above the knee, and finally that my leg would be paralyzed from the knee down. Back then, we were placed in wards of 45-60 people. I was the only one not wounded in Vietnam. I was an immature punk with a huge inferiority complex.

I saw some horrific things during my stay, but I also witnessed the brotherhood of vets and the things they did for each other and for me.

Looking back, there were more Christ-like attitudes in there than in some of the churches I have seen.

One night, I was sound asleep when I heard screams for help. A soldier I played checkers with that night collapsed in the bathroom. The staff carried him to his bed, and for over an hour, I watched as they worked on him until they finally pulled the sheet over his head.

I lay awake and wondered what would happen to me if I died, and I knew it wouldn't be good! Suddenly all the verses I memorized years earlier in Vacation Bible School came to my mind.

As I thought about the verses, I realized what I needed. That night, responding to what I knew and in a somewhat non-religious language and form, I asked for God's forgiveness and surrendered my life to Christ. He has never left me since that night.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

- graduated from Lake View High School in San Angelo in 1974
- attended Western Texas College in Snyder in 1974
- received a Bachelor of Mass Communication/Journalism from West Texas State University in Canyon in 1979
- received a Master of Religious Education from Southwestern Seminary in 1986

Ministry/Profession

Why do you feel called to your particular vocation?

I did not want to go into vocational ministry. Following high school, God and I fought for three long months before I surrendered. I knew nothing

about what “going into the ministry” actually meant. I thought you either had to be a pastor or foreign missionary. I had just read the book *Through the Gates of Splendor* about 5 missionaries being killed, and my pastor was being raked over the coals by some of the “little ole’ ladies” over the color of some new carpet. As far as I was concerned, the call to ministry was a death sentence!

I wanted to be a photojournalist or a sports writer. Finally, God asked me the decisive question, “Who’s in charge?”

This June will mark 43 years in vocational ministry. Every stage in this 43-year journey has led me to this point.

Please tell us about your association—where it’s located, the key focus of its work and ministry, etc.

Our building is located in San Angelo, Texas. Our southern-most churches are located in Ozona and Sonora. Our northern-most city is Sterling City. Between those two points is a distance of 109 miles. Luckily, San Angelo is close to halfway.

Of our 43 churches and missions, 26 average 100 or less in worship, 10 average 100 to 150 and the remaining seven range from 200 to 1300.

We have two African-American churches, two Western culture, eight Hispanic and two Korean. We are hosting an unApologetic Conference in October, with Korean- and Spanish-language tracks.

The first line of my job description is I am to be a “pastor to the pastors.” If all we do is encourage, refresh and strengthen our churches’ ministry staff (and that includes the ministry assistants), then we have done a good job. The healthier the church staff is, the stronger the church can be.

We sponsor training events and fellowships. We have started local mission

projects designed to help us help each other in building renovation projects. We have moved our Annual Gathering to Sunday night and try to bring in speakers who challenge and encourage the members in the pews. The program is aimed at them. Last year was unique in that we did a musical celebration of the diversity of the Concho Valley Baptist Association. It was great.

**What do you like best about leading your association?
Why?**

At heart, I am a pastor/equipper. I am working with some of the most incredible people who lead churches, and I am allowed to walk side-by-side with them and help in any way possible. And they help me.

What aspect(s) of associational ministry and/or its mission do you wish more people understood?

The Concho Valley Baptist Association is NOT apart from the churches, nor is it a parachurch group. The CVBA exists because the churches have chosen to cooperate with each other for the benefit of each other and the kingdom of God.

I do not tell the churches what to do. They tell me what their needs are, and together we strive to meet them.

How has your association and its mission changed since you began your career?

That would be a question better answered by the pastors who have been here longer than me.

How do you expect your association and/or its mission

to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

Each association is different because each group of churches is different. I believe the keyword we need to focus on is relevance. What is great in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex may not work in our setting. If a particular association is not relevant to its churches and for its churches, then it will cease to exist and it should.

Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your association.

Leadership is always a key issue.

During an interview, I was asked an incredible question: "What about this job scares you the most?"

I have thought about that often, and I decided the greatest challenge for a director of missions is the challenge to listen, not merely hearing but listening to understand.

What are the church leaders and the churches telling me? What do they need? Where are they hurting? How do they need to be challenged?

Am I listening to God? Am I responding to what I hear and to how God wants me to respond and on his schedule?

For the churches, I think the issue of cooperation and seeing the need to be a cord of three strands is vital. To do that successfully, our focus needs to be on Matthew 6:33, seeking first to build the kingdom of God. If we do that, then he will take care of his churches.

What one aspect of your job gives you the greatest joy or fulfillment?

Seeing what God is doing in so many lives and in so many churches.

Getting to know great people across the entirety of the associational family.

About Baptists

What would you change about the Baptist denomination—state, nation or local?

We have some great strengths: our commitment to God's word, to missions, evangelism and a growing awareness of the foundational need to make disciples as a mandate from God.

Unfortunately, we are not readily known for those things. We are known more for what we are against than what we are for, and that must change.

About Jeff

Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

There are too many to mention. I once had an older minister tell me that everyone is my superior in at least one way, and it is my responsibility to learn from them. I am truly raised by a village.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.

There is not one author I focus on. I enjoy Bonhoeffer and Swindoll, but I like to read books focused on apologetics and understanding where people are coming from.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

I have had numerous surgeries and health issues, and I Corinthians 10:13 has always helped.

Matthew 4:19 and 6:33 and Ephesians 4:1-12 have always been meaningful and challenging for me.

And I love Matthew 1:1-18. Jesus is the only person who has ever been able to select his family, and look who he put in it: prostitutes, Gentiles, murderers! If I were to put my family tree together, it would be made up of Christians who are rich and generous (what good is a rich relative who isn't generous?) and love the Cowboys!

Who is your favorite Bible character, other than Jesus? Why?

I like Peter because we both suffer from "foot-in-mouth" disease.

Barnabas because he stood up for and encouraged others and willingly stepped out of the spotlight.

Rahab because she had the choice to fight God, flee from God or follow God, and she chose to follow him. Some people tend to focus on how "brutal" they see God to be in the Old Testament. But everyone is given the same choices that Rahab faced.

Name something about you that would surprise people who know you well.

I am really an introvert at my core.

If you could get one "do over" in your career, what would it be, and why?

I would be more disciplined. I have tried to be more disciplined (repeatedly), but I guess I just don't have the discipline needed to succeed in this area.

Tell us about your family.

I have two grown kids who are married and have blessed us with three grandkids.

My true treasure is my wife. She is an incredible servant. We have put youth, college students and adults up in our house. I have called on her at the last minute to help, and she responds. In all the places we have served, no one knows all she has done for them or the kingdom. She has put up with my many health issues and kept me afloat. She also calls my hand on areas when needed. I call her "my Angel" because she is.