

Friends,

See the Baptist Standard article dated February 24, 2011, “[Texas Legislature May Cut All Funds for Professional Prison Chaplains](#),” which outlines in particular [Christian Life Commission](#) (CLC) Director Suzii Paynter’s noble struggle on our behalf. For those who do not know, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) has funded the CLC office for decades, with offices in Dallas and Austin, for the purpose of keeping an eye on ethical issues that impact the church and Christian values. It has been enormously successful at keeping before the Texas legislature issues dear to all Christian hearts, but especially the 5,000+ Baptist churches associated with the BGCT. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had a similarly named commission, whose name changed about ten years ago to Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission that does the same thing on the national level. With several others, she plays a pivotal role in this, as it were someone who is at the Texas Capitol every day of the session with 20-plus years of experience there, and the connections that go with that. Keep her in your prayers. In the article, the fellow mentioned that I “emptied a box of tissues every day,” which actually should have been “every month,” but we will not hold that against him. There are many more tears shed than I can count.

You may be aware, but most are not, Suzii Paynter was there for us in 1999-2001 when we led Chaplain Professional Equity, and again in 2007 when we led the effort that secured 25 more chaplains back to TDCJ (after the cut of 50 in 2003). There is a large difference between now and then, in that then it was primarily a few Chaplains (TDCJ, MHMR, and TYC) and a couple of others. This time is vastly different because the threat is not just real – sheeze – HB 1 eliminated the whole institution, and this time we were able to get breath of that at the critical time and many others “in the know” came *quickly* on board, like Emmett Solomon, Frank Graham, and Carol Vance ... with so many others. It will take all of us ... **TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More**. Yet, the powers that be that led – led – the effort to eliminate are *still* working. And it is not simply those alone, but the Texas deficit is critically ill ... No, I am not a conspiracy theorist here. There are simply some who *have* been working to thumb down ministry, and those of us in this process could name a couple of names – but our fight is not so much against them as it is to *truly, kindly, and persuasively* lead the way to clarity on the true value of Chaplaincy to ALL the mission critical functions, and – best of all – that it’s COSTS are entirely recovered to the common sense mind – the web site and [Save Chaplaincy Handout](#).

As mentioned in a previous note-should-have-been-update, Suzii Paynter has been joined by Bee Moorehead of Texas Impact and Jennifer Carr Allmon of Catholic Conference – aka God Squad or Charlie’s Angels – have come together. Similarly, a week ago, a columnist from Amarillo said he was a volunteer and writing in his column, but have not gotten it yet. Thanks to Chaplain Dan Chapman for the Houston Chronicle article – with picture of Rabbi Goldstein, and look at that red hair, so thankful he was there! Here are the three articles with links.

>click to go > [HOUSTON CHRONICLE – 3-4-11](#)

>click to go > [BAPTIST STANDARD – 2-24-11](#)

>click to go > [DALLAS MORNING NEW – 2-22-11](#)

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HOUSTON CHRONICLE – 3-4-11

[**Effort to eliminate prison chaplains met with criticism**](#)

By JEANNIE KEVER - *Houston Chronicle* - March 4, 2011, 10:07PM

Members of the state's religious community are fighting to save a \$4.8 million program that sends chaplains into Texas prisons, saying volunteers and prison guards can't handle the job.

"[Chaplaincy](#) is the heart and soul of the prison system," said Rabbi Dovid Goldstein, who oversees services and other programs for Jewish prisoners. "A body without a soul is a piece of dead meat."

Goldstein testified before the [Senate Finance Committee](#) last week, part of the outcry after the proposed budget in the House of Representatives killed the program to help address a shortfall of at least \$15 billion. The Senate version would cut but not abolish the program.

Even prisoners have weighed in.

"Our chapel classes and chaplains are vital ... in our recovery and rehabilitation of sin and bad choices," said a letter signed by 30 female inmates at the [Plane State Jail](#) in Dayton. "I fear the end result if this were to happen."

State Sen. [John Whitmire](#), D-Houston and chairman of the criminal justice committee, suggested it will come down to money.

"I'd rather not cut the chaplains," he said. "But if you've got to choose between chaplains and corrections officers, you don't have much choice."

Ultimately, he said, a compromise may be possible.

The threat to prison chaplains is only one issue on the religious agenda during the legislative session.

Other issues of faith

Some groups support legislation to restrict abortion services, including a proposal to require women to view a sonogram before having an abortion. Most are working together on budget, immigration and social issues.

"There's nothing more integral to what people of faith care about than the budget," said Bee Moorhead, executive director of Texas Impact, an interfaith organization. "It has to do with education and jobs, health and the well-being of children and the elderly and people who are sick."

Advocates for the program say it helps to prevent more expensive problems.

Emmett Solomon, a former director of the chaplaincy program who runs the [Restorative Justice](#) Ministries Network in Huntsville, said chaplains ease prison tensions and reduce the risk that an inmate will commit additional crimes after release.

The prison system has 121 chaplains, paid to serve the 114 prisons and jails, a practice that dates back at least to 1915.

"They're obviously a very valuable part of the prison system," said Michelle Lyons, spokeswoman for the [Texas Department of Criminal Justice](#).

A chaplain is assigned to each prison unit and expected to ensure inmates have a reasonable opportunity to pursue their faith. That may mean contacting clergy from a particular tradition, in addition to helping inmates of all faiths.

Goldstein is responsible for Jewish prisoners, most of whom are assigned to one of five units.

Chaplains act as counselors to both prisoners and prison staff and serve on the warden's executive management team, according to the TDCJ Offender Orientation Handbook.

Goldstein said chaplains are involved in emotional crises, helping inmates place calls to dying family members, or breaking the news when a relative has died.

"I don't see how the state is going to train a guard to do that," he said.



But chaplains also focus on the future.

"People think we go around with a Bible, singing *Amazing Grace*," said Father Ron Cloutier, director of correctional ministries for the [Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston](#).

But most inmates are eventually released, and chaplains spend a lot of time helping them prepare for freedom.

"If they have no job skills, no place to live, no one to help them, they're going to come knocking on your door when they come out," Cloutier said.

'State has a role, too'

Jennifer Carr Allmon, associate director of the Texas Catholic Conference, said some legislators believe volunteers can fill the void.

"Yes, the church provides many services for free," she said. "That's part of our role. But the state has a role, too."

And the 18,000 volunteers who work in Texas prisons, most of them from churches and other religious organizations, can't be turned loose without oversight, said Suzii Paynter, director of the Texas Baptist Budget Christian Life Commission.

"Somebody has to screen the volunteers, to make sure they're bona fide, they're trained, and that they know what they're supposed to do and not do," she said.

Training and supervising volunteers is especially important when protecting religious liberties for inmates whose faith differs from the volunteer's, she said.

"It takes a highly skilled person to negotiate those constitutional boundaries," Paynter said. "You might get a great volunteer, but there are no guarantees on that."

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BAPTIST STANDARD – 2-24-11

[Texas legislature may cut all funds for professional prison chaplains](#)

By John Hall, Texas Baptist Communications - Published: February 24, 2011

AUSTIN—In the wake of a significant budget deficit, Texas lawmakers are considering eliminating all professional prison chaplains, a move that could significantly affect the way volunteers from churches minister in that arena.

With Texas facing a \$15 billion budget shortfall, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice faces \$459 million in cuts. The proposed budget before the House eliminates all \$4.6 million allocated for the state prison chaplaincy program.



If included in the final state budget, all professional prison chaplains would lose their jobs. Fifty-five of the 120 chaplains are endorsed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

In addition to their counseling duties, chaplains are charged with managing prison religious programs that serve as the gateway for volunteers to serve in prison ministries. Chaplaincy also ensures prisoners have the religious freedom guaranteed to them in the First Amendment to the Constitution.

"I think TDCJ has one of the hardest budget-cutting scenarios in the state," said Suzii Paynter, director of the [Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission](#).

"There are a lot of things in TDCJ that can't be cut. But I don't see anything else in the TDCJ list of cuts that is protected by the First Amendment.

“Professional chaplaincy in the military and prisons is the way that protection is provided for constitutionally guaranteed religious liberty.

“Professional chaplaincy is a priority; other things need to cut before we cut something that protects the right to worship and practice your faith while incarcerated.”

Research indicates professional chaplains lower recidivism rates by at least 50 percent, improve inmate behavior and serve as valuable resources to offenders and TDCJ staff members alike, said Emmett Solomon, president of [Restorative Justice Ministries Network](#) and former director of TDCJ chaplaincy.

Chaplains also serve as the gateway for more than 18,000 volunteers who minister in prisons each year, continually recruiting and training them to help change the lives of inmates, Solomon noted. About 400 new volunteers serve in prisons each month as a result of chaplains’ efforts.

When the prison chaplaincy program suffered cuts in 2003, the number of volunteers significantly decreased, Solomon said. Eliminating prison chaplains entirely potentially could curtail the flow of volunteers that serve in prisons—the same volunteers proponents of the cut expect to handle chaplaincy services.

Paynter agreed, noting chaplains bring training, skills and experience that volunteers and other TDCJ staff members simply do not have.

“A volunteer can no more take the place of a professional when it comes to chaplaincy than a doctor, a lawyer or some other professional can be replaced by a volunteer,” she said.

“Without professional chaplains, there are no volunteers.”

Beyond the fiscal incentives of the chaplaincy program, Michael Maness, chaplain at the Lewis Unit in Woodville, noted the benefit of having a trained counselor in prisons. They minister to crime victims, offenders and TDCJ staff members. They also are charged with delivering news to offenders about family deaths and illnesses.

“I have emptied a box of tissues every day for 18 years,” he said. “That is doubled on the other side of those walls” with family members.

For more information about how to engage legislators on this issue, call the Christian Life Commission at (512) 473-2288.



DALLAS MORNING NEW – 2-22-11

[Faith-based lobbyists press on in Texas Legislature despite tight budget](#)

By SAM HODGES - Staff Writer - samhodes@dallasnews.com - Published 22 February 2011 11:15 PM

They’ve been called the God Squad and Charlie’s Angels.

Misery loving company, the three female, faith-based lobbyists have drawn even closer in this Texas legislative session, in which deficit projections as high as \$27 billion almost certainly mean big cuts to education, health care and other social programs.

“This is a very unusual session,” said Suzii Paynter, who lobbies for the Dallas-based Baptist General Convention of Texas as director of its Christian Life Commission.

Jennifer Carr Allmon, associate director of the Texas [Catholic Conference](#), said, “Our level of concern is much higher, because of the depth and breadth of the cuts.”

Paynter, Allmon and Bee Morehead — executive director of Texas Impact, an interfaith group — are hardly the only religious folks who try to make a case with legislators and other state leaders.

But they're the ones who do it daily, professionally, keeping close track of a range of legislation, learning nuances of state financing and policy, and trying to make a long-term difference.

"We'll be here next year, and the next. We're not just here to win one bill in one session," Paynter said.

The women are often in the same hearings and sometimes team up for visits with legislators. Morehead describes their work as public interest as opposed to special interest lobbying.

"Generally speaking, when the faith community is lobbying, it's not enriching the faith community in any way," she said. "It's improving the broader world."

Their legislative positions and priorities can differ sharply.

Anti-abortion legislation ranks first on the agenda approved by Texas Catholic bishops. Baptists remain stalwart gambling opponents, and Texas Impact champions a state income tax to stabilize funding for state government.

But they share an overall concern for maintaining a safety net for the poor. They're aware, as well, that such groups as [Catholic Charities](#) and Buckner International, a Dallas-based, Baptist-affiliated nonprofit, have social service contracts with the state that are endangered in the current budget crisis.

Alliances form

This session, the three lobbyists have aligned on a couple of specific issues.

One is to save the professional chaplaincy program in state prisons, which was zeroed out in the House budget bill.

"Everybody's freaking out about that," Morehead said.

At an annual cost of about \$4.8 million, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice employs 121 chaplains in prisons across the state. They provide pastoral care to 156,000 inmates and their families, and also recruit, train and supervise volunteer chaplains.

"If there's one place you need professional chaplains, people with training and skills, people who know the First Amendment and where the lines are, it is in prison," Paynter said. "It's only because we have a professional chaplaincy that we're able to have volunteers go into the prisons."

The lobbyists are collaborating in a more formal way on a campaign called Texas Faith for Fair Lending, an effort to reform payday and auto title lending practices in the state.

"It's the first time our three organizations have publicly partnered in forming a coalition on an issue," Allmon said.

Faith-based lobbyists are expected to be compassionate, and that extends to the legislators they try to persuade. Morehead laments many of the cuts but sympathizes with those having to make them.

"The leadership is really trying," she said. "This is not the hard-hearted pharaoh budget ... This is somebody's effort to minimize damage in places they can. But \$27 billion is a lot of money."

'Momentary chaplains'

The women say their faith backgrounds sometimes prompt legislators to pull them aside and ask for a prayer.

"Legislators are just human beings," Paynter said. "Their daughters get cancer, their moms die, things just happen in their lives."

“A lot of times, when you’re the religion lobbyist, whether you’re prepared for it or not, you become the momentary chaplain.”



Friends ... the Fast of Esther and the festival of Purim is coming. All that we do in the next couple months, or fail to do, will set the stage for the future of Professional Chaplaincy in Texas. So many have been working very hard – some of which have nothing whatsoever to gain – like the legislative Angels mentioned above. Some volunteers recognize how their own ministry is tied up with the good chaplains. Though not a truly fundable item or legislatively marketable item, again, I would pitch for the inmate in his most vulnerable hour – most vulnerable hour *ever* – in the death of a loved one in prison. The handshake. The human side. And for – mostly – the poorer family members. This last Thursday night, I connected a man – a not-so young MAN, an inmate – with his mother IN THE HOSPITAL. She cannot write and she has a hell of time getting her daughter and grand daughter and others to write for her. He had not heard from her in two months. They CANNOT afford the phones available on the wing. Several more tissues were used by that MAN who loved his poor mother as they shared their love over the phone. He slept better that night. She slept better that night. I felt like a champ, but KNEW that such would NOT be the case without a staff chaplain. Some of these kinds of calls require an availability and even on-going knowledge of the family affairs to complete ... if we lose professional chaplaincy, among all the other very serious losses to volunteer and religious facilitation, this signal issue of pastoral care is the hardest to track (even trackless at times) and among the most meaningful to the inmate, as well as to the TDCJ mission and the best values of Texas. Yes, there have been several hundred books written on the value of pastoral care ... but that is for another time.

Let’s save Professional Chaplaincy ... what we do today and the next couple of months, as it was in Esther’s 5th century time, will certainly be looked at as a great victory in very ominous times, or a great tragedy. Whoever it is, there are several who wish the end of Prison Chaplaincy – period – and it is not pleasant. Pray for the *Angels* and others. The KEY is constituents *connecting* ...

Sincerely, Mike

[Michael G. Maness](#)
[SAVE TEXAS PRISON CHAPLAINCY](#)



[RADIO Interview - Rep. Warren Chisum](#) - Does "NOT support removing prison Chaplains" - will "fight everyday" ... What one *should* do? - he said, "Write your state Representative and Senator" >> [Find YOUR Legislator Here < click](#)

[RADIO Interview - Suzii Paynter on Texas Budget Complication and Need and Alternatives for Prison Chaplaincy](#) >

[RADIO Interview - Bill Glass on Saving Texas Chaplaincy](#)

[Save Chaplaincy Up-Date #26 - 3-5-11](#) - Three Articles – Dallas Morning News, Baptist Standard, Houston Chronicle

[Save Chaplaincy Up-Date #25 - 3-4-11](#) - Two Radio Interviews and more

[Save Chaplaincy Up-Date #24 - 2-24-11 - Rep. Chisum & Carol Vance](#) - Chisum on Radio does "NOT support removing prison Chaplains"

[Save Chaplaincy Up-Date #23 - Dallas Morning News article 2-22-11](#) - Three Angels Working Hard !

[Save Chaplaincy Up-Date #22 - 2-22-11](#) - several continue to network, Jewish Rabbi Testifies ...