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BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE
ANNUAL GATHERING

JULY 2–7, 2017

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CALLAM BOOK BEING LAUNCHED

JUDSON PRESS, THE PUBLISHING ARM OF AMERICAN BAPTIST HOME MISSION SOCIETIES, is publishing the latest book by Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam. From Fragmentation to Wholeness: Race, Ethnicity, and Communion, is being launched in July in time for the BWA Annual Gathering, held July 2–7 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The book examines the impact that race and ethnicity have on divisions in the church. It shows how the Lord’s Supper provides a rationale for overcoming such divisions. The shared identity of Christians through fellowship in the body of Christ opens doors for unity and inclusion in the Christian community.

Jeffrey Haggray, executive director of American Baptist Home Mission Societies, said the book “is an urgently needed volume of profound reflection on the untapped power of Holy Communion as a force for reconciliation, healing and wholeness in the church and community.”

Haggray, a member of the BWA General Council and the Human Resources Committee, stated that “rarely in recent Baptist life has a global leader of Callam’s distinction and intellect blended this peculiar caliber of theological, pastoral, ecumenical and activist reflection into such an informative, compelling and accessible treatise. The church now has a fascinating new resource to accelerate our mission reach into the world.”

Callam, a Jamaican, was elected general secretary and chief executive officer of the BWA in Accra, Ghana, in July 2007. He was the first Black person and the first person who is neither an American nor European to hold the position in the international global organization for Baptists, founded in 1905.

He retires in December 2017.

Callam’s previous books include Pursuing Unity and Defending Rights: The Baptist World Alliance at Work and Deciding Responsibly: Moral Dimensions Of Human Action.

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The book “is an urgently needed volume of profound reflection on the untapped power of Holy Communion as a force for reconciliation, healing and wholeness in the church and community.”

— JEFFREY HAGGRAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN BAPTIST HOME MISSION SOCIETIES
The buildings churches erect for corporate worship serve multiple purposes. They also produce certain effects in both onlookers and worshippers. A church building announces to a community some message concerning the faith the church believes. Moreover, the public worship space speaks volumes about the people who commission its preparation.

One does not easily forget the suggestions aroused by entry into the remains of the Church of Simon Stylites in Aleppo, Syria; the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey; or in the Oleviste Church in Tallinn, Estonia. The same is true for the Andrew Gerow Hodges Chapel at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, or the University Baptist Church in Baltimore—each reflecting a distinct architectural style among the many found in the USA. The designation “sermon in stone” aptly describes these spaces where people gather for corporate worship. A single visit to any of these church buildings is as likely to generate one’s interest in church architecture as one reading of Joseph Early’s A History of Christianity will arouse an American undergraduate student’s interest in the field of church history.

Especially since the liturgical renewal movement of the 1960s, Protestant and Evangelical churches have increased their attentiveness to church architecture. Unfortunately, however, many of the rich insights that can be harvested from the voluminous literature produced seem to have escaped the attention of some sections of the Baptist family. Not surprisingly, therefore, some pastors, church building committees and architects have deprived themselves of resources that are available to assist them when they set out to design, approve proposed designs, or commission the construction of church buildings.

Architects can be tempted to prioritize beauty of design over the purpose church buildings are intended to serve. Sometimes, building committees may be too preoccupied with replicating or improving upon some church design that made an impression on them. Pastors, too, are often more concerned about how people will feel about a church building than about the theological considerations that undergird and inform the building’s design.

The design of the space used for public worship usually reflects a church’s self-understanding. If the focus is primarily on ease of audition, it may be because the worshippers are understood to constitute an audience waiting to be edified by the proclamation of the word, with the other dimensions of worship minimized or overlooked.

If the principal focus of the design is on visual effects, it may be because the people gathered as congregants are understood to be participants in a moving drama in which the church acts out the message it seeks to convey. This focus may also reflect convictions concerning the priesthood of the church. The people of God assemble for praise, confession, forgiveness of sin and thanksgiving. They anticipate receiving a word from the Lord, mutual counsel, offering up petitions and engaging in a sacred washing and a common meal.

The seating arrangement reflects the prevailing conception of the relationship between the minister and people. Not satisfied with an emphasis on the people as primarily listeners, some arrangements imply that the minister and people form an intimate worshipping community with each person reaching out to the other and everyone sharing in the ministry that is offered to God. Worshippers gather around a table, a pulpit and a baptismal pool whose placement is intentional.

Architects can be tempted to prioritize beauty of design over the purpose church buildings are intended to serve. Sometimes, building committees may be too preoccupied with replicating or improving upon some church design that made an impression on them. Pastors, too, are often more concerned about how people will feel about a church building than about the theological considerations that undergird and inform the building’s design.

The gathered community calls to mind the story of the triune God’s redemptive, healing, nurturing and renewing actions in human history and on the contemporary scene. It also seeks the inward renewal that informs and supports the worshipping community’s discipleship and mission.

Perhaps, it is for reasons exceeding mere necessity that the church began, not in sophisticated church buildings, but in the homes of its members. In an intimate setting, the members participated together in the divine mysteries. Theirs was a deep fellowship in Christ and a rich engagement with their Lord and with each other.

Where the people of God gather for worship in the open air, instead of under a roof, the matters discussed here may not constitute priority consideration for them. Where this is not the case, may God enable pastors, church building committees and architects to properly combine theological, functional and aesthetic concerns when they consider erecting places where the people of God will gather for “divine service.”

“The design of the space used for public worship usually reflects a church’s self-understanding. If the focus is primarily on ease of audition, it may be because the worshippers are understood to constitute an audience waiting to be edified by the proclamation of the word, with the other dimensions of worship minimized or overlooked.”

— NEVILLE CALLAM
“People support vision, not need. It is not saying, ‘please, we have a problem, could you help us out?’ We are saying, ‘we have a vision that is so exciting that we are giving you the opportunity to participate in that vision with the resources that God has given you.’”
Baptists in the West African country of Ghana ground their approach to funding the mission of the church on David’s proclamation in 1 Chronicles 22:14-16:

“I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. You have many workers: stonemasons, masons and carpenters, as well as those skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron—craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the Lord be with you.”

The Ghana Baptist Convention (GBC) is clear it is not engaged in begging. They are, instead, offering persons “an opportunity to participate in our vision. It is precisely the opposite of begging.” As a matter of integrity, the convention and its member churches are to ensure they “commit resources to exactly what you asked them for.”

GBC encourages and receives donations of various types, both cash and kind. These may range from donated labor and volunteer work, including the offering of advice and training; to gifts of land as well as tools and materials for construction and other work. “Although noncash donations do not come to the church with cash value attached, it is important that donor members attach an accurate cash value to those noncash donations,” GBC asserts.

GBC is deliberate in formulating a “resource mobilization strategy,” believed to be practiced by King David. This includes “separate strategies for mobilizing financial and in-kind resources.”

Careful attempts are made to have buy-in from Baptist members. Baptists who are business owners and executives are expected to lead by example in making meaningful contributions. The main aim of the Association of Baptist Business Executives (ABBEX) “is to mobilize resources to help the convention to promote evangelism and mission,” GBC declares. Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, GBC executive president and a vice present of the Baptist World Alliance, is first vice president of the ABBEX chapter in Accra, Ghana’s capital. Chapters are also located in Kumasi and Tema, other major cities in Ghana.

ABBEX and its members have made gifts of cars and SUVs, among other donations, to the convention to carry out its mission work in hard-to-reach areas of the country.

“People support vision, not need. It is not saying, ‘please, we have a problem, could you help us out?’ We are saying, ‘we have a vision that is so exciting that we are giving you the opportunity to participate in that vision with the resources that God has given you.'”

At least three times during the year, Ghana Baptists hold seminars on giving. Leaders are expected to lead by example by giving first, as King David did.

GBC recommends that its congregations emphasize giving while receiving persons into church membership. It should be made clear that what is practiced is “Christ-centred stewardship – that is, management of God’s resources for his intended purposes.”

**ALTERNATIVE FUNDING**

GBC is not shy in identifying alternative sources of funds for church work and has guided its congregations to examine these. Traditional sources come from tithes, offerings, special offerings, building funds, project funds, seed sowing, auxiliary days, revivals, thanksgiving and mission week. But the convention tells its churches and members, “you have to move from a culture in which tithes is the giving of a portion of income to God to a culture that sees everything as belonging to God.” Furthermore, “you have to move from a culture of giving just from income to one that gives from income and assets.”

The Club of 100 makes pledges and gives regular donations. Former members of churches, both in Ghana and other countries, are tapped for resources. Churches are not to be shy in asking members to offer loans. Some loans eventually turn into gifts. Mobilize the many; do not rely only on the few. Mobilizing “the many to give whatever little they can is more sustainable for the church. [It has] the potential to release far more resources than just relying on a few who give a lot.”

Congregations, in being proactive, should “promote the possibility of the members including the church in their wills.” Technological tools, such as social media, mobile networks, text messaging, etc., should be considered and utilized where appropriate.

Ghana Baptists have had to counter “poor understanding of the biblical commands to give” as well as “poor understanding of the needs within the church.” At issue are churches failing to articulate a clear and coherent vision and relying on just a few members. To overcome these obstacles, the GBC urges its churches to educate members on giving and combat suspicions “that the resources given are not well utilized.”
Excerpt from the document:

There is always money out there but it is such a competition these days. The further you are from the local church the harder and harder it gets. There are many excellent projects. We need to melt the hearts and open the wallets, tell the good stories and follow-up with donors with constant information. Donors must feel they are important and that they can make a change with what they are doing.

Some parachurch organizations have more resources than the local union, the regional Baptist body and the Baptist World Alliance because they are much more focused on fundraising than we have the ability to be.

For the future we need to find sustainable projects, develop more funding and be more self-sufficient than we’ve been in the past. While this may not apply in cases of emergency response, it is indeed the case for past. While this may not apply in cases of more self-sufficient than we’ve been in the past. Projects, develop more funding and be more self-sufficient than we have the ability to be.

It is easier for local churches and parachurch organizations than bigger church bodies such as the Baptist World Alliance. It is hard for us to be close enough both to the donors and the receivers. It is important to build up close relationships and trust, showing that the project is important to us not just as a Baptist body but also for the donors willing to support us.

There are many good projects that could be handled that way. That may be a new way to determine how we receive money. We should have ethical guidelines to determine how we receive money. We should have ethical guidelines to determine how we receive money. We should be wary when donors attach conditions to their gifts. It is important to understand where the money is coming from. Most times this is not a problem but if we have difficulties, there are times we have to say, “No, this is not in line with what we as a church can receive.”

We need to have ethical views on how we receive money. There is money we don’t want to receive because of the way it is earned. It is a problem. In Norway we have ethical guidance for investments. There are certain parts of the stock market we will not be a part of because of human rights abuses and concerns, pollution, weapons and so on.

We should have ethical guidelines to determine how we receive money. We should be wary when donors attach conditions to their gifts. It is important to understand where the money is coming from. Most times this is not a problem but if we have difficulties, there are times we have to say, “No, this is not in line with what we as a church can receive.”

We should take responsibility as Christians where we live because God has blessed us with many good gifts. It is our responsibility to give back what belongs to Christ.
IT IS WELL UNDERSTOOD THAT THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL FOR PHILANTHROPY DOES NOT TRANSLATE well to other cultures. In this model, the operating questions are: What motivates people to give? Who gives? What is the price of giving? Why do people volunteer time to charitable activities?

The best way to explain the Baptist World Alliance to a North American is to say it is an organization with the form of a “trade association.” The BWA is an organization of organizations. In that form, the organization exists for its members and the members provide the support for the organization.

As currently comprised, the BWA is an organization whose members provide less than half of BWA support. Asking others to provide that support without allowing them to participate at the highest levels is limiting that support. Knowing the limitations the BWA faces, it cannot be expected that there will be lasting support from segments that are kept out of the structure and decision making process at the BWA.

As a religious charity, the BWA is limited mostly to targeting donors who are positively inclined toward Christianity. Further, the BWA is likely to attract only those Christians who identify as Baptists.

AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY
Why do people give? This has been widely studied and many studies suggest that people are not 100 percent selfless in giving. Individuals often weigh the tangible and intangible benefits to themselves when making decisions about gifts for others. The nature of these benefits, however, is not always discernible.

Some donors care about the “problem” being solved by a charity—i.e., hunger, poverty, etc. Others may care about the total impact of the work charities do—1,000 wells drilled, 10,000 mosquito nets distributed, 750 orphans fed, etc.

Still others may care about the public recognition they receive from giving, wishing to be recognized or listed in publications or at public and private events; or to have programs, buildings or other things named for them; and many wish to have a role in the decision making process regarding the programs they support, such as scholarships for an alma mater.

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP
This American model conflicts with the church’s model of stewardship. In the stewardship model as understood by churches in the West, it is presumed that all resources are provided by God. The Christian responds in gratitude to that provision by sharing generously.

In the church’s model of stewardship, the motivation may be gratitude or duty, but it is not supposed to be for recognition or reward in this life. The BWA, as a church-based organization, finds itself in direct conflict between the stewardship model of giving altruistically and without reward, and the American model of giving for one of the three motivations above. While some church giving may have components of one or more of those motivations, the basic philosophy of stewardship does not support those motivations. In effect, BWA must try to raise money against the Christian stewardship culture and model.

BWA AND INDIVIDUAL DONORS
The BWA is at a disadvantage relating to individual American donors in part because BWA often funds projects developed and administered by others, such as one of its member organizations. In addition, the largest part of the BWA budget funds programs difficult to quantify for those who have expectations of impact—worship, unity, fellowship, theological reflection, religious liberty, human rights, etc.

“Why do people give? This has been widely studied and many studies suggest that people are not 100 percent selfless in giving. Individuals often weigh the tangible and intangible benefits to themselves when making decisions about gifts for others. The nature of these benefits, however, is not always discernible.”

– KATHE TRAYNHAM, BWA ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Kathe Traynham
Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone, BWAI'd
Completed water tank for a community, 2015

FUNDING BAPTIST WORK

FUNDING BAPTIST WORK
For most USA charities, board members who oversee the governance of the charity are the top donors, or have the ability to pull together other important donors through a natural constituency. It would be highly unusual for a charity to have board members who were not willing to personally support the charity and its goals and provide for its financial needs. But this is the case of the BWA. Of all those who participate in BWA meetings and structure—more than 800—very few are individual donors. Individuals have traditionally provided approximately one third of BWA total donations to the general fund. In other words, in the BWA, those who give have very little voice in what the BWA does.

The BWA needs to change the way it relates to individual donors. Most individual donors are not denominational employees and are not likely to be appointed to the BWA by a member organization. This makes the BWA a charitable organization unlike most others. Its base of individual donors is not welcomed into the BWA structure for participation, other than attending our meetings as “observers.”

Adjustments are necessary. Some changes to be considered include honoring donors with public recognition without offending or compromising the values of non-American cultures in the BWA; empowering the general secretary to form boards of reference or honorary committees of top donors as advisors on BWA ministry, especially those requiring ongoing support from individual donors; and naming individuals that support the BWA financially to BWA governing bodies.

“Of all those who participate in BWA meetings and structure—more than 800—very few are individual donors. Individuals have traditionally provided approximately one third of BWA total donations to the general fund. In other words, in the BWA, those who give have very little voice in what the BWA does.”

—KATHE TRAYNHAM
Member Bodies Financing BWA

By Neville Callam

From the very beginning, BWA was intended to be a worldwide organization. Today, we rejoice that this dream has come true. BWA member bodies originate in 122 countries and territories in six continental regions. Whenever an initiative is introduced in the organization, care needs to be taken to honor the Christian values of an ecclesial organization. A valiant effort is also made to reflect sensitivity toward the disparate cultures and traditions of BWA’s constituent members.

When it comes to BWA member bodies financing BWA’s operation, different traditions and approaches exist. In this article, we identify two types of traditions and examine how BWA might increase its financial support by introducing a flexible fundraising program that reflects the operational modalities found among its constituent members.

The “Assessment” Model

In some parts of the world, BWA members do not understand they have anything to do with any BWA fundraising program. Instead, they assume that member bodies will contribute to the budget of the organization they voluntarily associate with as part of their commitment to a shared Christian mission.

Member bodies elect persons to represent them at annual BWA meetings. These delegates consider the organization’s proposed program and financial requirements. When proposed program and budget are approved, the delegates understand that this imposes certain financial obligations on all BWA member bodies.

Before the start of each year, some member bodies expect the BWA to assess the amount to be contributed by each group. They anticipate that the contribution each member is asked to give is fair and reasonable, reflecting the size, capacity, and other relevant features of each member body. If they receive no assessment, they may conclude that no particular amount is required of them and that their contribution is optional. This interpretation may hold even though, when they apply for membership, all BWA member bodies pledge to contribute regularly to the organization’s budget according to their financial capacity.

Once BWA makes an assessment of the contribution it asks of each member, BWA will consult with each group to secure their agreement on the amount identified. After agreeing on how much BWA should anticipate receiving from the group, the member body is expected to make every effort to send in regular contributions on the basis of the agreement made. This approach is consistent with those who adopt a certain understanding of the meaning of membership. They believe that membership confers obligations on each member, which includes bearing some financial responsibility for the operation of the body in which one holds membership. Failure to play one’s part in financing the ministry authorized by the representatives of member bodies is understood as a failure in Christian stewardship and a sign of unfaithfulness to God.

BWA may need to consider adopting a new approach when it is dealing with member bodies that normally operate on the basis identified above. This involves BWA identifying for certain member bodies a minimum sum of money they are asked to contribute to the BWA General Fund over a particular period. The member bodies will understand that the organization’s ability to carry out the program of ministry the BWA General Council approves for a particular period depends on their honoring the amount requested and pledged.

An Alternative Model

In some parts of the world, BWA member bodies operate with a different set of values. First, they do not begin by acknowledging that their representatives in the BWA play a significant role in defining the focus of the BWA mission, identifying the priorities in BWA’s ministry, and determining the program of work to be undertaken by the organization in any given period. Nor do they acknowledge that their contribution to funding BWA’s ministry is concerned? These BWA member bodies tend to believe that BWA ought to develop a program aimed at furthering the aims of the contributing partners. In this perspective, BWA is expected to take certain actions, including electing a general secretary who maintains cordial relationships with all BWA stakeholders, including those who are the primary sources of BWA funding.

BWA is expected to hire a fundraiser whose duties should include keeping the BWA in regular contact with the BWA’s major funding agents to ensure that they are impressed about the importance and urgency of the work BWA undertakes. The fundraiser is expected to convince them, on an ongoing basis, of the importance to the BWA’s health, the efficient and effective ways in which their financial contributions are being spent, and the extent to which BWA relies on their support.

To secure funding on the basis of these values, BWA may need to take certain steps, such as...
abolishing the Nominations Committee and the rules governing the numerical composition of BWA commissions and committees. Instead, BWA should identify values that should inform the composition of BWA’s work groups, including global representation and regard for the distribution of spiritual gifts (charism) by the Holy Spirit. By returning to the general secretary responsibility for naming BWA work teams, space will become available for an appropriate response to major donors and potential major donors. More ways can be found to cause these persons to feel they are recognized by BWA, included in the decision-making process, and are participants in the execution of the organization’s ministry.

Furthermore, the general secretary may need to be given authority to identify and include specially gifted persons in committees and commissions and in certain programs. The general secretary should also be empowered to appoint BWA ministry leaders, viz. directors, who will assist the effort to attract funding for the organization’s work. The general secretary should also be given space to develop and introduce honorary teams of major donors without having to go through an involved bureaucratic process.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CONCERNS
Several assumptions govern the suggestions made above. These include the following: That the organization can successfully work with a differentiated funding system; that the general secretary will have a clear understanding of the global dimensions of BWA and will be committed to safeguard the multicultural and multiethnic basis of BWA operations; and the BWA can successfully operate with two distinct understandings of membership held by its member bodies. If it can, a mechanism needs to be developed to put a system into operation by which funds are requested from member bodies. Continuous efforts will be needed to encourage and develop positive donor relations.

In the end, whatever strategies are adopted, the hope is that the integrity of the organization as an ecclesial body governed by Christian principles, such as justice, fairness and equal regard for all, will not be compromised.

The net result is a reduction in the gross amount received from some geographical areas from which significant contributions to BWA have come over the years. BWA member bodies reduced their contribution to the BWA by including within it contributions that previously would have come in separately from the churches. If this tradition continues, BWA will soon lose significant funding from churches with a long history of making direct contributions to the organization.

As we look to the future, BWA may need to consider whether it can operate with two distinct understandings of membership held by its member bodies. If it can, a mechanism needs to be developed to put a system into operation by which funds are requested from member bodies. Continuous efforts will be needed to encourage and develop positive donor relations.

In the end, whatever strategies are adopted, the hope is that the integrity of the organization as an ecclesial body governed by Christian principles, such as justice, fairness and equal regard for all, will not be compromised.

THE BWA MISSION
Initiatives taken to address the BWA funding challenge include:

- The development and implementation of a comprehensive Donor Recognition Program, which features a dated action plan with specified deliverables.
- Reorganization of the process of communication between BWA and its stakeholders to ensure the possibility of everyone remaining aware of the initiatives of the organization and to strengthen donor loyalty. This was supplemented by communication with certain member bodies to enable accurate and clear understanding of their giving record and to stimulate a positive response.
- The naming of some BWA friends as BWA Ambassadors to further BWA’s drive to increase its donor base.
- The introduction of a program to highlight the contribution of some outstanding Baptists as part of the effort to inform the Baptist family of some credible witnesses to the Gospel among us and to nurture faithful supporters of BWA’s ministries. This initiative ended when the BWA introduced an Awards Committee as a sub-committee of the Executive Committee. The Awards Committee may wish to consider whether to renew the program when the BWA introduced an Awards Committee as a sub-committee of the Executive Committee. The Awards Committee may wish to consider whether to renew the program to celebrate individual witnesses whose example can inspire us all.
- The launch of new funds, the principal one being the 400 Legacy Fund (4LF) that was introduced in 2009. Proceeds from the 4LF have been appropriated annually to provide BWA with budget support. Other funds were for designated purposes and could not be appropriated against BWA’s general expenses. One example of these is the Evangelism Fund which is being capitalized to the tune of US$250,000.
- The successful introduction and management of a planned giving program. The Legacy Gift program includes a website with financial, tax, and planned giving information for USA taxpayers. The site also offers tax and benefit calculators and customizable brochures on a variety of planned giving topics and mechanisms. The program also includes a weekly newsletter email service and frequently updated materials for planned giving appeals and approaches. Over the last 10 years, BWA has realized US$700,000 from bequests. Meanwhile, promised gifts to be realized in the future now stand at more than US$1 million.

BWA is grateful to its member bodies, Baptist-related institutions, individual churches and donors that have contributed US$26.7 million to its work over the period January 2007 to December 2016. This amount includes US$5.4 million contributed to the General Fund by BWA member bodies; US$8.4 million given by individual churches, institutions and individuals; US$11.7 million donated to BWAid; and just over US$700,000 in bequests.

Excerpted from report to the BWA General Council, Bangkok, Thailand, July 2017
Thank God for the honor and the privilege to serve in the Baptist World Alliance. It is God that gave us this wonderful global family. We will always be thankful to God for the men and women who were obedient to God’s call to form this great movement of Baptists.

I fail to imagine the life of Baptists in the world without the BWA. It is not surprising that those who pioneered the initial steps toward the establishment of the BWA had such a deep longing to see Baptists of the world come together. That longing was expressed in the statement by the leader of the General Baptists in England, Thomas Grantham, in 1678. “I could wish that all congregations of Christians of the world that are baptized according to the appointment of Christ would make one consistory, at least sometimes, to consider the matters of difference among them.”

I wish to acknowledge with much appreciation BWA General Secretary Neville Callam for his deep commitment to the unity of the family and, as a result of that effort, we have the Covenant on Intra-Baptist Relationships. I thank God that a special fund has been set up in honor of Neville Callam to pursue this goal. Our commitment to the unity of the BWA family is rooted in the words of God in Ephesians 4:3-6:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

We who serve in the leadership have a great task of making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. We have been called to be patient with one another in the spirit of love so as to build this one body to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The challenges of our time require a strong BWA. Let us continue to hold hands and put more effort into our priorities which are Christian unity, mission and evangelism, freedom and justice and relief and sustainable community development.

We are the church of our Lord Jesus Christ and we are standing on His promise in Matthew 16:19 that says, “and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

This promise, which was made by the Lord Jesus Christ, applies to local congregations, to the association and region, to the convention and union and to the BWA. Therefore, I can say that, like Paul the apostle of our Lord, if God be for us who can be against us?

I thank everyone for your tireless effort and hard work. You have offered yourselves, your personal resources and that of your associations, conventions and unions to serve the BWA. The Lord sees your commitment and your labor in His Kingdom. He who rewards every good work will surely reward you in due time.

Excerpts from a report to the BWA Executive Committee, March 2017

Footnotes
1 Horace O. Russell, Baptist Together in Christ 1905–2005, (Published by the BWA), pp. 1.
BAPTISTS AND OTHER CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS CONTINUED

At the request of the Roman Catholics, a third phase of dialogue is scheduled to begin in December 2017. Meanwhile, the report on the current five-year round of dialogue with the Methodists should appear next year. As indicated earlier, the official reports of past dialogues are downloadable free from the BWA website. Hopefully this tradition will continue.

What has been missing from the dialogical process in which BWA has engaged with other CWCs is a systematic process for the reception of the ideas flowing from the dialogues. In the distant past, certain steps were taken to aid reception and also to test the coherence of professed belief and actual practice among Baptists. One recalls, for example, the study on baptismal practice of churches associated with BWA. In addition, surveys have been conducted to discover Baptist attitudes to, or practices concerning, open membership. At one stage, what is now called the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity issued a publication reflecting the attitude to church unity found in BWA’s regions.

As I indicated when I addressed the 2013 Baptist International Conference on Theological Education, BWA may need to pause to develop a comprehensive document reflecting its understanding of bilateral theological dialogue – something akin to the Roman Catholic’s Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism, 1993.

The document could explain BWA’s reasons for engaging in dialogue, how it chooses dialogue partners, how the focus for a dialogue is determined, how it selects Baptist representatives for a dialogue commission, how it agrees on the final text of a dialogue report, how it promotes positive reception of dialogue findings and how it tests reception among Baptists.

This comprehensive statement will provide guidance, especially for leadership, that is not steeped in the history and tradition of bilateral theological dialogues at all levels—local, national, regional and international. Examination of reception among Baptists could provide vital information for any future phase of a bilateral dialogue.

Other CWCs expressed a desire for a dialogical relationship with BWA. However, these initiatives could not be accommodated owing, in part, to the lack of appropriate infrastructure to facilitate multiple bilateral dialogues taking place simultaneously and the challenge of securing adequate funding for dialogues.

BWA strives to develop a healthy relationship with other CWCs. BWA contributed to the review of the St. Andrews Report—a study document of the Anglican Church that discussed the ties that bind Anglicans together. The frequency with which several CWCs, including Roman Catholics, have invited BWA participation in some of their significant gatherings reflects the state of our relationship with the various global church organizations.

On the ecumenical front, I am pleased that BWA welcomes representatives from CWCs at its congresses. In addition, during recent years, BWA has been hospitable to Baptist groups that enter into organic union with churches from other traditions. I recall the pattern of argumentation that accompanied the discussions in the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland when the union, as a part of the Free Churches, considered the possibility of entering into organic union with other churches. Some participants claimed that “to enter a United Church would lead to separation from other Baptists throughout the world.” Thankfully, the Baptist Union of Sweden entered into a United Church with the Methodist and Covenant Churches of Sweden and retained, in its new configuration, its membership in BWA.

ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to fostering relationships with other CWCs, BWA has endeavored to build effective relationships with ecumenical church organizations. BWA has not ignored the important world of multi-lateral theological dialogue. The Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Christian Unity analyzed the Faith and Order report on the church, but its perspectives have not been sufficiently publicized.

While editorials appearing in BWA publications offered perspectives on mission statements developed by the Lausanne Movement and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (WCC), it remains unclear how far the wider Baptist community...
BAPTIST GROUPS UTILIZE A VARIETY OF NAMES TO DESCRIBE THEIR GROUPINGS. They self-identify as unions, conventions, conferences, assemblies, associations, fellowships and councils.

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam says these names “reflect the perplexing diversity that marks the Baptist family worldwide.”

Callam, who delivered the 2017 Willson-Addis Lecture at Baylor University in Texas, in the United States, in March, says “lurking behind these names are multiple ecclesiologies, but also the multiple cultures—diverse customs and traditions—found within the global Baptist family.”

He suggests that the BWA has had to negotiate the varied Baptist understandings and practices while forging a worldwide movement toward unity of Baptist Christians. The BWA has been careful to state, in its early formative documents, what it is not.

The BWA, for instance, “was not a body with supervisory powers over the churches”; it “was not authorized to exercise juridical power over individual churches and the unions and conventions they establish”; it “would not trample on the autonomy of its member bodies”; and it “would not compete with, or duplicate the work of, the churches forming it.”

But Callam insists that the “BWA is not a mere body of affinity. It is not simply a fellowship of likeminded persons. … Nor is the BWA merely a voluntary association of people claiming to share a common heritage.”

Rather, the BWA is “a fellowship or communion of churches … that exist in association with each other.” This association has “ecclesial density.”

The BWA provides “guardianship of congregational authority” while, at the same time, demonstrating and embodying “commitment to the furtherance of Baptist oneness.” Drawing on the works of Stanley Grenz and Paul Fiddes, Callam suggests that the groundwork exists for Baptists united in the BWA to adopt “a distinctively Baptist communion ecclesiology.”

This understanding of the church in communion terms is “strong enough to contain the variety of ways in which Baptist life is ordered” locally, nationally, regionally and globally. It is also dynamic enough to include relationships with church groups outside the BWA community.

The Willson-Addis Lecture at Truett Seminary, Baylor University, examines practical Christianity from a variety of perspectives within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Past lecturers included Philip Jenkins, Stanley Grenz, Ronald Sider and Diana Garland.
BWA SUPPORTS UNIVERSITY CHAIR IN HONOR OF
BAPTIST THEOLOGIAN

BY NEVILLE CALLAM

James William McClendon, Jr. was a theologian who held teaching positions at a number of institutions, including Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, the Graduate Theological Union and Fuller Theological Seminary in the United States.

His highly acclaimed extensive literary corpus includes *Biography as Theology* and his 3-volume *Systematic Theology*. He is credited with developing what he termed “the baptist vision.” McClendon, Stanley Grenz and Paul Fiddes are three Baptists who have developed comprehensive versions of a Trinitarian theology.

Stanley Hauerwas, who once said of McClendon, “I always suspect that God gave Jim a Catholic body but forced him to live a baptist life—a small ‘b’ Baptist life,” called the first volume of McClendon’s *Systematic Theology* “the turning point of modern Christian theology.”

Miroslav Volf called McClendon “one of today’s premier American theologians.” Curtis Freeman once praised McClendon for seeking “to overcome the poverty of baptist theology” by recovering “a distinctive baptist vision as a standpoint for theological reflection” and by retrieving “diverse baptist voices as partners for theological conversation.”

When the Dutch Baptists were establishing a chair in McClendon’s honor at the Free University in the Netherlands, they invited BWA’s participation by way of co-sponsorship. This opportunity was enthusiastically supported by the BWA Executive Committee in March 2017. BWA co-sponsorship of the chair entails publicizing the establishment of the chair and petitioning financial support.

I urge Baptists to record our gratitude for McClendon’s contribution by supporting the fundraising program for the establishment of the chair. Funds sent to BWA for this purpose should be designated “McClendon Chair.”

Donations may be made online at www.bwanet.org/give or sent to:

Baptist World Alliance
405 North Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046 USA

Excerpted from report to the BWA General Council, Bangkok, Thailand, July 2017

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— BWA GENERAL SECRETARY NEVILLE CALLAM
THE ROAD TO ZURICH 2018  
BY NEVILLE CALLAM

On March 5, 1983, 10 years after the commencement of bilateral theological dialogue involving BWA and WARC, the Baptist Theological College in Ruschlikon hosted a Day of Encounter, convened under the auspices of WARC. Participants heard papers prepared by Reformed, Baptist, and Mennonite representatives. The Day ended with a service of reconciliation in the Grossmünster, the church of Zwingli. This service marked the 500th anniversary of the birth of Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli’s successor in Zurich. It included a prayer led by the president of the Reformed Church in the canton of Zurich.

This prayer marked a significant stage in the healing of memories process, which culminated, on June 26, 2004, with another service of reconciliation in the Grossmünster, marked by expressions of confession by the Swiss Reformed Church and of forgiveness by the Mennonites.

This was followed by the inauguration of a stone plaque established beside the Limmat River, near the place where the Reformed Church had Felix Manz and some of his Anabaptist friends executed by drowning.

Six years after the 1983 Day of Encounter, BWA and WMC started a “theological conversation, which ended in 1992, with a report celebrating both communions’ affirmation of “the believers’ church as a free church, a voluntary body of believers baptized upon confession of faith.”

BWA decided to convene the 2018 Gathering in the city of Zurich during the 2017–2024 period chosen by the Swiss Reformed Church for the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The ERCZ letter stated, in part:

We are determined to continue following the path of reconciliation and mutual commitment with the nowadays worldwide movement which shares common roots with us, spiritually and historically. This is not only true when referring to the direct physical descendants of Zurich Anabaptists, but also to all churches and denominations which have been founded as non-state churches.

We are aware that you as Baptists share both Anabaptist and Reformed confessional roots. To us, being true to both light and shadow of our history belongs to a truthful celebration of 500 years of reformation.

A wonderful opportunity is given to BWA and its member body, the Baptist Union of Switzerland, to engage with the ERCZ. Already, we have agreed to include in the 2018 Annual Gathering opportunities for theological discussion and a joint celebration of worship in the Grossmünster.

Let us bear witness, together with Christians from other church families, to the liberating and transforming power of the Gospel.

Excerpted from report to the BWA General Council, Bangkok, Thailand, July 2017

“A wonderful opportunity is given to BWA and its member body, the Baptist Union of Switzerland, to engage with the ERCZ. Already, we have agreed to include in the 2018 Annual Gathering opportunities for theological discussion and a joint celebration of worship in the Grossmünster.”

— BWA GENERAL SECRETARY NEVILLE CALLAM
I AM A SOUTH AFRICAN, born and raised during the difficult dark days of apartheid. The most tragic story about South Africa is that the church was used to propagate and sustain the policies of segregation. Even though South Africa had produced awesome leaders who fought for justice, there was still so much wrong about the image of the church.

There were times when Christianity was viewed with suspicion in South Africa. This was before the rise of great church leaders like Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak, Frank Chikane, Buti Thlagale, Stanley Mokgoba, Beyers Naude and many others.

One thing that the old apartheid regime succeeded to do was to keep South Africans from being exposed to the outside world. Many Baptists, including me, were not exposed to the Baptist family outside the borders of South Africa. The experience and knowledge about Baptists was limited to my country. There was very limited exposure to theological reflection.

The definition of “Baptist” was also limited to one context. There were times in those days when I had serious struggles with my identity as a Baptist.

I mentioned above that the old government managed to keep the citizens of South Africa from being exposed to the outside world. This meant that we were exposed mostly to South African literature. If there was any outside literature, it had to be approved by the state. Some of the literature that was banned by the old South African government included any writings by Martin Luther King, Jr.

During those days, it was not that easy for most of us in South Africa to publicly affirm our Baptist identity. We were dominated on all fronts by the mainstream churches (Methodists, Lutherans, Anglicans and Catholics), Pentecostals and Charismatic churches. Worst of all, there were times when Baptists were not part of any ecumenical body in South Africa. The evangelical church in South Africa was seen as very irrelevant and, at times, as part of the government system. This was disheartening, and it hampered our witness.

My first exposure to the Baptist World Alliance blew my mind. My former knowledge of who Baptists were was revealed to be inaccurate.

First, I came to know that we are a big family, not just a sect that is trying to survive. I was so overwhelmed by the realization that the Baptist Church has reached all over the world. Even though I had read the history of missions, I had never met Baptists from all over the world.

My first General Council in Durban, South Africa, in 1998, was a joyful experience. By that time, I had already been told about the worldwide family of Baptists, and at the General Council I met the representatives of this great movement of Baptists.

I joined the Commission on Baptist Heritage immediately. It was encouraging to learn that Baptists have been champions for justice and human rights. The frustration of being associated with a church that could not respond to social justice issues was over. It gave me a new identity of who the Baptists are.

The BWA helped me to deepen and expand my understanding about Baptist identity. This was like the beginning of another part of my Christian journey. My Baptist roots started to grow deeper. The BWA became a place of learning from a wealth of Baptists’ experiences from all over the world.

The BWA is a unique movement that is able to bring the wealth of Baptist experiences from all over the world into one space. It is unique in the sense that it is not a limited segment of the family but a space where we meet as the full family, the young and the senior, the lay and the clergy.

The affirmation that I received in the BWA family has helped me to grow in my Christian life. I was nurtured within a difficult system where I needed to fight for acceptance and recognition, but in the BWA I was welcomed. This is what every believer needs.

I have seen God use the BWA to build and nurture me and all who have become part of this family. There are many Baptists who come from difficult situations worse than mine. They need to be encouraged and affirmed by people who share their faith.

The BWA provides the space to share our witness and listen to the witnesses of others. Such exposure stretches our horizon to see far beyond our situation. It helps us to know how to pray for one another.

Personally, I would have not been where I am today if it was not for the BWA family. This is not my testimony alone but it is a testimony of many. God has used the BWA to nurture and develop many Christians in the world.

I, therefore, take this opportunity to invite you and your church to come along and be part of God’s movement through the BWA. Come and become part of this family. For the BWA to continue existing and impacting the lives of many in the world, it needs you to become part of the family, to pray for the BWA and to give financial support.

Participating in BWA Day is one way to become involved.

There is still much work to be done, and there are many people who will be impacted by the mission of the BWA.

Paul Msiza is pastor of Peniel-Salem Baptist Church in Pretoria, South Africa, and president of the BWA.
HOW THE BWA ENRICHES MY MINISTRY AND MISSION PARTNERSHIPS
BY CRAIG SHEROUSE

THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE HAS BEEN A PART OF MY LIFE FOR FOUR DECADES.

My participation with the BWA began as an academic interest in their remarkable history and advocacy for religious liberty, peacemaking and racial reconciliation.

I attended my first BWA Congress in 1980. I have served on commissions, committees and on the General Council. I have quite a collection of BWA meeting lanyards and nametags. In other words, I am something of a BWA groupie!

I have been to some interesting places through the BWA—Cuba, Malaysia and South Africa, to name a few. And I have met some remarkable people—well-known international Baptist scholars and leaders as well as never-heard-of pastors of small churches in forgotten places.

I have preached in a Seventh Day Baptist church through the BWA friendships I have made. I have met all of the Baptist pastors (four) in Turkey. The stories of the local Baptists in such places have humbled and inspired me.

I have heard many firsthand accounts of religious persecution in places like the Middle East, Nigeria and Romania.

I have shed tears and emptied my wallet in response to stories I have heard about refugees, ethnic-cleansing victims and evangelistic successes.

As a local church pastor for 41 years, my ministry and missional partnerships have been greatly enriched by the connections I have made through the BWA.

A 20-year partnership with Bahamian Baptists started through the BWA. Those churches are now a part of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Florida. Our church started a pastors’ school in central Haiti, helped greatly by connections made through the BWA.

The beautiful diversity of the Baptist world family is always on display when the BWA meets, particularly in the worship music of the Congresses, held every five years.

We met there, German and British and American, Russian and Czech and Romanian, Chinese and Japanese and Australian, Albanian and Serbian, Hutu and Tutsi, Palestinian and Jew.

And in the underbelly of a bombed-out cathedral, we had communion. We came to the cross. For where else could we come? Who else has the power to make from so many, and such former enemies, one?

There, at that communion table, we could see the ultimate expression of suffering: He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

There we could see the miraculous power of suffering to reveal God’s mighty works, even the power to forgive our sins! “For with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). There we, who once were enemies, have been reconciled through the death of his son.

Where else than a BWA meeting could I have had such a profound spiritual experience?

Craig Sherouse is senior pastor of Second Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia, USA, chair of the BWA Commission on Baptist Heritage and Identity and member of the BWA General Council and Human Resources Committee

“As a local church pastor for 41 years, my ministry and missional partnerships have been greatly enriched by the connections I have made through the BWA.”

– CRAIG SHEROUSE
HOW THE BWA’S GLOBAL FAMILY WIDENED MY VIEW

BY MEREDITH STONE

GEORGE W. BUSH DELIVERED HIS STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS ON JAN. 29, 2002, and described regimes that sponsor terror as an axis of evil.

Just a little over four months prior, the US had experienced the terrorist attacks of 9/11. During those four months, soldiers and armies were mobilized to fight the Taliban, and US citizens lived in fear of further terrorist action and the consequences of how the US might respond to the disaster of 9/11.

President Bush’s State of the Union answered the questions that existed in the minds of many and started the wheels in motion toward what has been called the Iraq War, or the Second Gulf War.

In that same month and year, I began seminary. Sitting in my first class in seminary, I was aware of the war that was soon to come for the US. But I must admit that my perspective was limited to what that war meant for people who lived in the same country as I did.

I thought about the Marine for whose wedding I had served as the matron of honor just a year earlier. I thought about his wife and family. I thought about countless others who would be in the same situation as that young wife, left sitting at home wondering if she would ever see her husband again.

But I am ashamed to admit that I never thought about how that war would affect Christians who lived in Iraq or Afghanistan, much less each and every person who lived in the places US forces would soon invade.

My worldview was small. I didn’t even have a passport.

Fortunately for me, I was in a seminary with professors who had passports filled with pages and pages of stamps, professors who had lived in countries other than the US for many years. Those professors began to widen my gaze.

In addition to the many different religious groups across the world about which I learned, my professors taught me about the Baptist World Alliance. Before this, I had never truly considered the implications of the fact that Baptists lived in every corner of the globe.

Then, nearly 10 years after beginning seminary and at the encouragement of one of my former professors, I applied for my first passport so that I could attend an Annual Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance. At that meeting, my worldview moved from the fact that Baptists lived in every corner of the globe.

Today, I am the professor. When undergraduate ministry students arrive in my classes, I realize that they sit in a similar seat to where I sat just a few years ago. They live in a nation that is filled with angst.

Though the threat of war may not be as immediate, they know that our country is currently divided and that the way the US relates to other countries is changing. They know that immigration laws are tightening, trade deals are being altered and the management of military affairs is shifting hands.

And the perspective of my students may be limited to how all of these issues affect only people, specifically Christians and Baptists, in the US. So I have taken on the mantle of widening their gaze and helping them realize that the world is much larger than one nation, one president, one issue, one viewpoint.

Like my professors before me, I hope I can introduce my students to a global family of Baptists who worship and partner together, who stand up for one another, and who teach each other how to truly understand that all people are created in the divine image, not just Americans.”

– MEREDITH STONE

“Like my professors before me, I hope I can introduce my students to a global family of Baptists who worship and partner together, who stand up for one another, and who teach each other how to truly understand that all people are created in the divine image, not just Americans.”

Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance. At that meeting, my worldview moved from acknowledgement that Baptist Christians across the globe exist to meeting those people face to face. I met extraordinary people who ministered in situations that were unlike anything I had ever known. I was introduced to advocates who fought for freedom, justice and issues about which I needed to learn more.

I met professors from across the world who were trying to figure out what it means to teach and learn from a Baptist perspective. I listened in worship as these newfound sisters and brothers sang praise songs and prayed in their own languages.

I heard stories of people who survived typhoons, warfare and genocide; I found friendship and cooperation in the worldwide Baptist family in order that they might begin the process of rebuilding their communities.

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Like my professors before me, I hope I can introduce my students to a global family of Baptists who worship and partner together, who stand up for one another, and who teach each other how to truly understand that all people are created in the divine image, not just Americans.

One way we all work toward gaining a broader perspective is through the observance of Baptist World Alliance Day in our churches. I hope together we can embrace our global Baptist family through participation in this event.

Meredith Stone is instructor of Christian ministry and Scripture, and director of ministry guidance at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, USA. She serves on the BWA Commission on Christian Ethics.
HOW I BENEFITED FROM ATTENDING BWA MEETINGS

BY MICHAEL OKWAKOL

I first heard of the Baptist World Alliance when I joined the staff of the Baptist Union of Uganda as traveling secretary in 1984.

Ten years later, while serving as general secretary of the Baptist Union of Uganda, I got to meet some of the officials of the BWA when I attended the All Africa Baptist Fellowship (AABF) meeting in Ivory Coast.

It was at that meeting when I stood to contribute to the discussion that was on the floor, that Denton Lotz, then general secretary of the BWA, took note of me. From then on, I received invitations and support to attend subsequent meetings of the General Council. Since then, I have endeavored to attend as many of the BWA meetings and have engaged in various committees and commissions of the BWA as much as I possibly can because there are lots of benefits.

What are the benefits?

The first and the greatest benefit is sharing experiences and expertise. Because those who attend the meetings come from various contexts, everybody has a unique experience and expertise to share. There is also the sharing of various gifts and giftedness.

The other benefit related to sharing is the learning that takes place because of the various ideas and practices in the ministry in the context of where the meeting is held. All those who attend the BWA meetings are often very resourceful persons who come with lessons learned in life and in ministry. Because of this, one will always learn something new or some way that is new and helpful for ministry in their context.

Another benefit is the cultural, political and religious exposure one gets visiting another country for the BWA gatherings. BWA meetings expose one to all levels of leaders from lay to professional to clergy. The level of engagement is always by presentations of papers. Some papers are philosophical and some are practical. The level of engagement challenges one to be academically capable to engage. I, for one, was challenged to go back to school to study more in order to contribute more.

After working in the same environment with the same people for months, it is refreshing to be able to meet brothers and sisters from other parts of the world.

Fellowship is another benefit of attending BWA meetings. It is always a great experience to know that we are all the same despite where we come from. The fact that everybody’s nametag does not carry titles allows people to fellowship with one another without feelings of inferiority or superiority.

It has been said that leadership can be lonely or it can be lonely at the top. This is another benefit BWA meetings offer: the opportunity to make ministry friends for encouragement and follow-up. This often happens around tea breaks and around lunch or dinner tables.

Various connections for ministry opportunities also come out of these times, and ministry partnerships have developed out of these connections.

BWA meetings are also times to identify with Baptists from around the world and to be identified by Baptists around the world. These meetings help expose one with his or her resourcefulness to others and vice versa.

This helps BWA leaders with placing persons on BWA committees and commissions and with identification of leaders for current BWA ministry needs and identifying emerging leaders.

It is said that the world is run by tired people. Sometimes BWA meetings are where one can find time to rest once he or she has participated in their assigned meetings.

Churches need to engage with the BWA for both exposure to various ministries of the BWA and exposure of their leaders to other Baptist leaders around the world so that iron will sharpen iron.

Observing BWA Day is an excellent way to introduce your congregation to the Baptist World Alliance and to encourage participation in the annual gatherings.

Michael Okwakol is senior pastor of Agape Baptist Church in Kampala, Uganda, past president of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship and a BWA vice president.

“Fellowship is another benefit of attending BWA meetings. It is always a great experience to know that we are all the same despite where we come from. The fact that everybody’s nametag does not carry titles allows people to fellowship with one another without feelings of inferiority or superiority.”

– MICHAEL OKWAKOL
SOcio-political crisis in Cameroon

by Godwill Ncham

The socio-political crisis in Cameroon has had its toll on the church in very significant ways. It first started in October 2016. The Anglophone lawyers’ strike was closely followed in November by the Anglophone teachers’ strike.

The common denominator was that Anglophone culture and values in these two spheres were being eroded by the dominance of the French. It has since degenerated into a socio-political crisis with civil society joining the cause with incessant calls for civil disobedience.

In all these, the Cameroon Baptist Convention has stood for biblical spirituality, justice, calm and objectivity. We have spoken via press releases. We have joined our voices with the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon and with the two frontline denominations in the country, the Roman Catholics and the Presbyterians.

While physical violence subsided in the midst of a series of arrests, schools in Anglophone Cameroon (including Cameroon Baptist Convention schools) have not reopened since November 2016. Anglophone lawyers have not been going to court since October 2016.

Please pray [for] Cameroon.

Godwill Ncham, a member of the BWA General Council and Human Resources Committee, is executive president of the Cameroon Baptist Convention

Conflict and displacement in Central African Republic

by Nicolas Aimé Simplice Singa-Gbazia

I solemnly call on you to pray for the Central African Republic (CAR), my very dear country in which God has called me to serve him.

Indeed, we have been shaken by the war since 2012. The Central African Republic is living through the darkest moment of its history with thousands of abridged lives.

In March 2016, hope was born with elections that brought to power the president of the Republic and the deputies of the nation. Unfortunately for some months there has been a resurgence of war over almost the entire territory, thus putting the people in despair at the deepest level.

In the towns of Niem and Koui in the west of the country, the population is exposed to dramatic consequences from attacks between rival armed groups. Today, hundreds of lives have been lost, causing people to live in the bush.

In the cities of Bambari and Ippy in the southcentral region of the country, attacks between rival groups have caused several deaths. People live in refugee sites.

In the town of Bria in the north, populations are in the bush and several houses were set on fire. Loss of life is significant.

In the southern town of Alindao, attacks between rival armed groups caused more than 400 deaths, including a Baptist pastor, Ange Applyon Ngakoulada, 36 years old, leaving behind a widow and six orphans.

In the southeastern city of Bangassou, attacks between rival armed groups left more than 200 dead the week of May 7. Several Central Africans are obliged to seek refuge in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Currently in the town of Zangba (Mobaye) in the southcentral part of the country, there is confrontation and several people have perished in DR Congo.

We are not sure of the future of the country. Road traffic is reduced. United Nations forces deployed in the Central African Republic are overwhelmed.

The country no longer has an army to defend the people because of the embargo on arms to the CAR.

Pray for the CAR and, if possible, mobilize to provide basic aid to the displaced.

Nicolas Aimé Simplice Singa-Gbazia, a member of the General Council of the BWA, is president of the Association of Baptist Churches of the Central African Republic
SOUTH SUDAN
CHOLERA OUTBREAK
BY SAPHAO RIAK CHOL

War and famine are causing great suffering to the population in South Sudan. There is a cholera outbreak in most parts of the country.

A National Prayer Day was called by the president for March 10, 2017. This is recognition by the political leadership that everything else has failed. Only God will save the country. “Unless the Lord guards the city, those guarding it do so in vain.”

The president also declared the setting free of all political detainees and the commencement of National Dialogue. This is a positive move, too.

May God bless you all as you pray and seek to help the South Sudanese people.

Donations may be made online at www.bwanet.org/give or sent to: Baptist World Aid c/o Baptist World Alliance 405 North Washington Street Falls Church, VA 22046 USA

Saphano Riak Chol, a member of the General Council of the BWA, is general secretary of the Faith Evangelical Baptist Church of South Sudan

EASTER IN THE MIDDLE EAST
BY BADER MANSOUR

While the world celebrated Easter, I reflected on how Easter was celebrated by Arab Christians in the Middle East, where Christ himself was risen from the dead almost 2000 years ago.

We call Easter “the big holiday,” compared to the smaller holiday of Christmas. The season begins 40 days before Easter, as people fast from eating dairy and meat products for 40 days, and weddings are not allowed in the Lent period to remind us of the suffering of Christ.

Easter is also celebrated twice in the Middle East, with a few weeks separating western and eastern calendars. Growing up, we celebrated once with my father’s family and once with my mother’s family. I also continue that tradition since my wife, Rula, was born in a Greek Orthodox family while mine comes from a Catholic tradition. The year 2017 is a leap year so both western and eastern Christians celebrate at the same time; this was a real reason to rejoice as the feast was more festive with everybody celebrating together, especially since Christians are a small and struggling minority in the Middle East.

Easter week usually begins with the festive celebrations of Palm Sunday, as kids dress up in their best outfits and march carrying huge candles decorated with flowers and olive branches. Church services are carried out all week with the peak being Good Friday, or “The funeral of Christ,” as we call it. It ends with Easter Sunday and a few additional days of vacation.

Easter is incomplete without a shortbread cookie called Maamoul. Maamoul is stuffed with date paste or chopped walnuts or pistachios and dusted with powdered sugar. These buttery cookies are the perfect reward after Lent. Luckily, my sister in Nazareth sent me some this year.

The Maamoul is an Easter special: While the outside of the cookie symbolizes Christ lying in the tomb, the inside is an explosion of sweetness to symbolize the resurrection and Jesus rising on the third day.

I visited Emeritus Missionaries Gene and Jane Eller in Bristol, Virginia, in the United States. Jane Eller has a beautiful collection of different Maamoul wooden molds that she collected during her 18 years of service in the Middle East. Gene Eller was the principal of Amman Baptist School in Jordan and Nazareth Baptist School in Israel.

This year, the events of the Holy Week in the Middle East were traumatic. On Palm Sunday terrorists bombed two churches in Egypt killing 50 worshippers. During Holy Week social media was filled with shocking pictures of blood covering palm branches, but that didn’t prevent inspiring stories of great faith from Egyptian Arab Christians spreading a message of love and forgiveness to their enemies and asking Him “to forgive them as they do not know what they are doing.”

In recent years, Christian Arabs have been fleeing Syria and Iraq, becoming targets of terrorists in Egypt and feeling the heat in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories. Millions of Christian Arabs have immigrated to the West in recent years, and many more are considering it.

As we greet each other with the traditional greeting on Easter, “Al Massih Qam” (Jesus is risen from the dead), the response to this greeting is “Haqqan Qam” (He has truly risen). Remember to pray for Christian Arabs to experience the power of Christ’s resurrection as they take their role that Jesus assigned them to be “salt of the earth.”

Bader Mansour, from Nazareth, a member of the General Council of the BWA, is the development officer of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel. He is temporarily residing in the USA.
I MET MY HUSBAND WHEN I WAS 16 YEARS OLD. We loved each other and later on we got married. We loved children and looked forward to starting our own family!

A perfectionist by nature, I had huge dreams for my children. However, my life was shattered when we discovered that our firstborn was autistic. He was 3 years old at the time. I saw him in the eyes of other people, doctors included. A sense of despair and failure overwhelmed me.

I struggled to accept my son! I sacrificed my education in an attempt to try and understand. I had no clue how to communicate with him. I sought help but was constantly advised that he should go through this therapy or that. Yet at the end of the day when we’re at home I remained clueless as to how to reach him. I felt as if my son was a curse, a punishment from God for my leaving Jehovah Witness upon getting married.

Life became very tough and my husband and I were heading towards a divorce. I did not want to lose my family and so started searching for means and ways to communicate with my child.

Sometimes God allows us to hit rock bottom before He can work in and through us. I met a Christian lady who helped me see through Scripture that God was not punishing me. That he is a God of grace, love, mercy, and that he has a plan for my life.

The more I read his Word and drew closer to him, the more I saw miracles happening in my life. My son started talking! My newfound friend, the wife of a church pastor, invited me to come to church with my family. Challenged, I thought to myself, “How can I?” Families with special needs children are most times not welcome in the homes of their wider family, so how about in a church where people don’t know us? The truth is that we become sensitive and avoid situations that can bring us more pain, such as hearing well-intentioned people tell us: God help you deal with this calamity!

After much consideration I started going to church—on my own at first. Then the pastor asked me, “What is your vision?” My response was, “I don’t know.” I have nothing in hand but would love to help families who discover that their children have special needs. For the phase we go through until we accept our children is very tough and can be destructive. The pastor’s response was, “Come and teach us. Help us understand what it is like to have a special child.”

And so I did. The congregation was very accepting and wanted me to bring my son with me, which wasn’t easy! At first he would stay by the elevator, not wanting to go in. Then, gradually, he started entering. At times there would be a birthday and he would get agitated and throw himself on the floor, shouting. Yet never did any of the church members say or react in a way that made us feel we were a nuisance.

I wasn’t satisfied seeing my son playing with his iPad or his dad’s phone during Sunday school. So I started adapting the Sunday school curriculum offered in the church in a manner that helps my child. University students at the church asked me to teach them what to do, to help them help us.

The church became a supportive environment for us. But that was not enough; there was more that we as parents needed to do for the sake of our child and others like him: Pray! Connected to God we can be like Christ. Such children help us acquire the fruit of the Spirit. With them we have to be patient. Accept things that are different. With time we see that we are changed.

I once saw my child as a curse, yet because of him, my family and I have come to faith. I once saw my marriage as a failure. Yet today my husband and I stand by and support other families with special needs children. I once had no hope.

The church is the hope of the world. We need to embrace these children and love them and learn from them and accept them. It is very hard. We need churches to love us and embrace us.

What we bring to the table is the deep spiritual experience that God allows us to go through.

“Sometimes God allows us to hit rock bottom before He can work in and through us. I met a Christian lady who helped me see through Scripture that God was not punishing me. That he is a God of grace, love, mercy, and that he has a plan for my life.” – LSESD NEWSLETTER, JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

Reprinted from the LSESD Newsletter, January/February 2017
REACHING OUT TO SYRIAN REFUGEES

BY HANNA MASSAD

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN ARE STILL STRUGGLING and are looking for ways to hope again. Life is difficult where they are. Christian Mission to Gaza entered into a partnership to take care of their social, physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing. We socialized with 50 Syrian families, creating a safe space where they can meet one another, to know that they are not going through this alone.

We talked about forgiveness. What is it like to forgive and let go? Why forgive your enemies and those who hurt you?

In forgiveness, we let God apply his justice in our lives. When we forgive, we win. Even our health becomes better as we let go and trust God who created us.

Hanna Massad, former pastor of Gaza Baptist Church in Palestine, is founder of Christian Mission to Gaza and is based in Amman, Jordan

“In forgiveness, we let God apply his justice in our lives. When we forgive, we win. Even our health becomes better as we let go and trust God who created us.” – HANNA MASSAD

Distribution of supplies in Jordan
THE BAPTIST-AFFILIATED ARAB CENTER FOR CONSULTING AND TRAINING SERVICES organized post-trauma workshops for 150 Syrian women refugees. Besides bringing comfort and instilling hope in their hearts, they set a better future for their families.

Sessions covered topics to include the circle of grief, children and war, relationships with mothers-in-law and children.

Awareness was raised about the different forms of violence with emphasis on sexual and gender-based violence.

Syrian refugees have spent seven consecutive winters in Jordan. In February 2017, a Jordan Baptist relief team distributed blankets to 414 Syrian refugee and Jordanian households.

Reprinted from ACCTS/AWT NEWSLETTER, March/April 2017

"Besides bringing comfort and instilling hope in their hearts, they set a better future for their families . . .

Awareness was raised about the different forms of violence with emphasis on sexual and gender-based violence."

— ACCTS/AWT NEWSLETTER, MARCH/APRIL 2017
SURVIVAL IN IRAQ

ONE OF THE MOST MOVING AND DISTURBING VISITS I HAVE UNDERTAKEN ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN BAPTIST FEDERATION CAME IN APRIL 2017 when Jan Saethre and I visited Iraq.

We were taken to Christian towns and villages in the Plain of Nineveh, not far from Mosul, where the entire populations had been driven out by ISIS/Daesh. Their churches were damaged and desecrated, as well as their homes and businesses.

At the end of last year ISIS was driven out but, understandably, Christians living as refugees in Erbil in Kurdistan in the north are afraid to return. But God is raising up some courageous Christian leaders “for such a time as this.” There are two gifted Baptist pastors, Ara in Baghdad and Sabri in Erbil, whose churches are reaching out to refugees and others with the good news of the Gospel in words and in deeds of aid and compassion.

We met Rabi, a wealthy Iraqi Christian driven out from his hometown, who had a new experience of Christ in exile partly because of his contact with our Baptist pastor there. He now works with the refugees in Erbil by initiating the rebuilding of the infrastructure of abandoned towns and villages further south to enable them to return.

He told us that he calls his project “The Rock,” based on the words of Jesus to Peter: “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not stand against it.”

Here are people who have been “at the very gates of hell,” but in the town we visited have erected a huge cross at its entrance to signify the continuing presence of the risen Christ who, even there, will rebuild his church.

We ask our whole BWA family to continue to pray for the Christians of the Middle East, especially Iraq.

Excerpts from report to the BWA General Council, Bangkok, Thailand, July 2017

“Here are people who have been “at the very gates of hell,” but in the town we visited have erected a huge cross at its entrance to signify the continuing presence of the risen Christ who, even there, will rebuild his church . . . We ask our whole BWA family to continue to pray for the Christians of the Middle East, especially Iraq.”

— TONY PECK
Drawing on Psalm 81, I used my meeting with three persons who crossed my way in the last few months and compared these encounters with the situation at home in Norway.

Otinielu Tauteimalae Tausi is Tuvalu’s Speaker of Parliament. Tuvalu is one of the smallest nations in the world, located in the Pacific. He was on his way to Brussels to discuss climate change with the European Union. His land will disappear in 40 years if climate change continues at the current pace. The island state of Tuvalu has signed an agreement with New Zealand for the entire population to be relocated there if needed.

Otinielu’s problem with water is far from Norway’s water and river planning where we are concerned if the river would rise two to three meters in a flood.

Oumou Younoussa Bah-Sow is a professor and chief physician at a hospital in Conakry, the capital of Guinea in West Africa. She leads the national health commission on ethics. During dinner, she recounted the shock of discovering Ebola in her country. In a desperately poor country without the necessary resources, healthcare should prevent infection, cure the disease and enable those providing care to survive.

Oumou’s problem with Ebola is far from the flu vaccination Norway does every year so pensioners would remain healthy.

Sief is a young Muslim man from Aleppo in Syria whom I came to know in my church. He fled his hometown five years ago to go to Jordan, and continued the travel one year ago to Norway. For someone who cannot swim, the boat ride in the dark night over the Aegean Sea between Turkey and the Greek Island of Chios was scary. He survived and was granted residence in Norway. Sief is sorry for having lost five years of schooling and feels it is a lot to make up. But he is still alive.

Sief’s problem with lack of education is far from my county governor’s office checking if each student received proper teaching independent of the resources available.

My focus on Norway is simple compared to the world out there. Our challenges have a spiritual focus. We all see and feel challenges and hindrances in the world we live, but we are under the supervision of the Almighty God.

“My focus on Norway is simple compared to the world out there. Our challenges have a spiritual focus. We all see and feel challenges and hindrances in the world we live, but we are under the supervision of the Almighty God.”

– JAN SAETHRE

In recent years, there has been sad, sometimes tragic, news coming out of Ukraine. Our country has been through a thorny path.

It is with great joy that I share with you good news, a hope that we are indeed at a turning point in our country. The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations made April 2 and 3, 2017, All-Ukrainian Prayer and Fasting days. This united all followers of Jesus in our country.

Uniquely, for the first time since independence, the author of this initiative was the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Filaret.

Speaking in the Parliament of Ukraine, he called on all believers, both Orthodox and Protestant, regardless of their denominational affiliation, to unite in fasting and prayer, to ask God for help and protection during this difficult period in our country.

Members of all political forces applauded this initiative. It is a clear sign that Ukraine is on the right path, leaving Soviet atheistic totalitarian thinking and striving for great spiritual changes through repentance before God.

On behalf of the Prayer Group in our Parliament, I am asking you to join the believers of Ukraine in prayer for our country.

Pavel Unguryan, a member of the BWA General Council, is a parliamentarian and deputy minister of environment in Ukraine.
ROY BELL, former principal of Carey Theological College in Vancouver, Canada, and a past vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, died on May 11 in Duncan, British Columbia, Canada. He was 91 years old.

Born in Bangor, Northern Ireland, Bell was a longstanding pastor, denominational leader, educator and a well regarded preacher in his adopted homeland, Canada.

Under his leadership, First Baptist Church, Vancouver, where he was senior pastor from 1970–1981, experienced significant numerical growth. Other congregations he pastored included Strathcona Baptist Church in the city of Edmonton and First Baptist Church in Calgary.

Having a background in education, psychology and theology, he served as principal of Carey Theological College from 1981–1984. He moved the school toward affiliation with the University of British Columbia and enhanced continuing education and distance education activities.

Bell served the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC) in its various iterations, being president when it was the Baptist Union of Western Canada, from 1969–1970; and again as president from 1976–1979, when it was the Canadian Baptist Federation.

A BWA vice president from 1980–1985, he was chair of the Congress Program Committee for the 16th Baptist World Congress in Seoul, Korea, in 1990, where he was also a featured speaker. He served on the BWA General Council, the Executive Committee, the Baptist World Aid Executive Committee, the Long Range Planning Committee, the Commission on Pastoral Leadership and the Commission on Worship.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam conveyed "condolences of the worldwide Baptist family" to his surviving relatives. He said the BWA was indebted to Bell for the "sterling leadership he gave in planning the congress and for his outstanding contribution to ministerial formation."

Upon retirement, Bell was professor emeritus of Family Ministries at Regent College and Carey Theological College in Vancouver.

Among his noted publications was Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate, co-authored with Stanley Grenz, as well as Models of Handling Conflict.

The Elizabeth and Roy Bell Prize in Pastoral Care, awarded to a student showing exceptional understanding of and skills in pastoral care at Carey Theological College, is named in his and his wife’s honor.

He passed away two days after he and Elizabeth celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary.

Funeral service was held at First Baptist Church, Vancouver, on May 28.

He is survived by wife, Elizabeth; son, Jeremy, executive minister of CBWC and a member of the BWA General Council and Executive Committee; and daughters, Jennifer, Gillian, Rosemary and Joanne.

TRULA DUANE died on June 2, in Gainesville, Virginia, in the United States, of pancreatic cancer. She was 81 years old.

Duane was a longstanding supporter of the Baptist World Alliance and was a former member of its Executive Committee and the Promotion and Development Committee.

She helped found the Fairfax County Voluntary Action Center and worked for more than 20 years with Youth for Understanding, retiring as vice president of Programs where she spearheaded several initiatives.

Duane did volunteer work for other organizations in the Washington, DC area, including the Duke Street Trinity Baptist Memorial Foundation and the NorthStar Church Network.

A scholarship in her name is being awarded for students at the John Leland Center for Theological Studies.

Her love for travel saw her visiting 33 countries and all 50 states in the US.

Funeral service was held on June 13 at Vienna Baptist Church in Virginia.

Predeceased by husband, Jerry and son, Scott, she is survived by daughter, Jami Lyn.
A joint funeral service and burial took place April 27.

**Grady Cothen**, former president of Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) and of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), both in the United States, died at the Orchard retirement home in Ridgeland, Mississippi, on May 19. He was 96 years old.

Cothen, a US Navy chaplain during the Second World War from 1944-1946, served successive periods as congregational pastor of the White Oak Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee; Olivet Baptist Church in Oklahoma City; and First Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

He became executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist General Convention of California in 1961, leaving that position in 1966 to become president at OBU. He left Oklahoma for the presidency of the NOBTS in 1970.

In 1975, Cothen became president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now Lifeway) until his retirement in 1984.

A member of the Baptist World Alliance General Council and the Executive Committee, he was chair of the BWA Division on Evangelism and Education Executive Committee and of the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup. He also served on the BWA Long Range Planning Committee.

Cothen was instrumental in the founding of the Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE), first held in 1982 at the Baptist Assembly ground in Ridgecrest, North Carolina, in the US. BICTE, which brings together Baptist educators who serve in institutions for ministerial formation, is planned and sponsored by the BWA and is normally held every five years.

He was also influential in the inauguration of the BWA Mini Library Program, which provides theological books and texts to pastors in developing nations in Europe and Two Thirds World countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said of Cothen, “the BWA found a keen and thoughtful listener, a wise and caring counselor and an outstanding leader.” Cothen was generous, gracious and conscientious “in the service he offered” to the global Baptist community.

Former BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz described Cothen as “a friend, an educator, a great preacher and evangelist, a chaplain, a college and seminary president, a state executive, a publisher, a world Baptist and a model of Christian diplomacy.”

Cothen also was part of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, the American Association of Theological Schools and the YMCA in Nashville, Tennessee, among other organizations and groups.

He earned degrees and diplomas from Mississippi College and NOBTS, and honorary degrees from the University of Richmond, Campbell University and California Baptist College, among others.

He received the E. Y. Mullins Denominational Service Award from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Order of The Golden Arrow from Mississippi College and the Distinguished Alumnus Award from NOBTS.

Several lecture series have been established or held in his honor, including the Gheens Lectures in Religious Education at Southern Baptist Seminary, Lectures in Christian Theology at Stetson University, the Hobbs Lectures on Baptist Heritage at OBU and the Hester Lectures of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges.

A graveside service was held on May 23 at the Roseberry Cemetery in Mascot, Tennessee.

He leaves wife, Mary; son, Grady, Jr.; and daughters, Carole and Mary. His first wife, Martha (Bettye) predeceased him in January 2005.

Prominent South African Baptist layman, **Bongani Khumalo**, 58, died on April 19 and his wife, **Matlakala Khumalo**, 56, died on April 22, both from natural causes.

In 1998, Bongani Khumalo, a lawyer, was part of the Transformation Committee of the Baptist Convention of South Africa (BCSA). As chair of the BCSA Constitution Committee, he led in the drafting and passing of the convention’s constitution and bylaws and influenced the constitutions adopted by Baptist regional associations affiliated with the BCSA.

Khumalo was instrumental in formulating model contracts for churches, pastors, human resource departments and church properties.

His knowledge and expertise in church constitution and contracts led to his appointment as chair of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee of the Baptist World Alliance from 2010–2013. During that time, the BWA made significant constitutional changes.

He was also a member of the BWA Executive Committee and the Commission on Human Rights Advocacy.

Khumalo served his country in significant capacities. He was a former chair and chief executive officer of the Financial and Fiscal Commission. In this capacity, he made recommendations to Parliament, provincial legislatures, local government and other organs of state on financial and fiscal matters. In December 2016, he was recognized for his contribution by the country’s parliament.

Between 2007 and 2010, Khumalo was CEO of Boxing South Africa, which administers and regulates professional boxing in the nation.

At the time of his passing, he was deputy commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of South Africa.

He earned diplomas and degrees from the University of the North and the University of South Africa, among other South African higher learning institutions.

Matlakala Khumalo, a business owner, was diagnosed with Lymphoma cancer in August 2016 and died just days after her husband’s passing.

They are survived by son, Bongani Jr.; and daughter, Portia.

A joint funeral service and burial took place April 27.
Growing up in South Africa during the old oppressive regime was dreadful. The irony was that the African majority were oppressed by just a handful of European immigrants. During those years whites comprised only 25 percent of the total population of the Republic of South Africa.

Why did Africans allow this to happen, and for so long? Or perhaps the first question should be, why did we allow European immigrants to take over the land and oppress the whole nation?

There are answers to this very complicated situation. One answer may lie in the social values of Africans in South Africa. It is, quite possibly, a value among other Africans. It is a value that says, be kind to your guests. Open the door for them and be hospitable.

European settlers were our guests who came to our land. As a people, we were guided by the value that welcomes strangers, giving them food and water. If they want to become part of the community, the chief of the village would allocate them land to live on. They would become part of the community.

Africans never expected their guests to pay back their kindness with a takeover. Chiefs and kings believed the land was big enough to be shared. Before Africans could understand where these guests came from, they woke up one day only to realize that their land and cattle were taken by the guests. That systematic takeover ended in the evil system of apartheid.

Among many dehumanizing laws and practices within the apartheid system were separate doors and cash register counters in shops. There were clear signs on these shops and restaurants, written in bold, “Whites Only.” In restaurants and cafes that sold take-out meals, there was always a window at the back or side where Africans stood in line to buy food. In most, if not all the shops, stale food from the previous day’s sale was sold from the windows.

In 1986 we were on a mission trip as students from the Bible College. We stopped at a nice restaurant, went inside, sat at a table and waited to be served. We realized that the workers were giving us strange looks. We requested service but the owner came and told us we were not to sit at the table. We were trespassing. We were not allowed to enter the door. We were taken aback and felt insulted when he told us that Africans were not allowed in the front. He pointed us toward a small, dirty window where we needed to make purchase.

South Africa was at the height of revolution in 1986 and many concessions were gained through struggle. One concession was that Africans were now allowed into restaurants and shops. We were now allowed to enter through the same door as white people. This restaurant owner was among the few in the country who resisted change and who tried to hold on to the past. Feeling insulted, we left and drove on empty stomachs with hopes of finding another place to eat.

In South Africa and other countries with systems of segregation, the door had meanings about privilege and status. It was a privilege to be allowed in through the front door. By entering that door it puts one in the same status as everyone else. When two people enter through the front door of a restaurant or shop, it does not matter how much they have in their purse. It is not how much they spend. What is important is that they are both allowed through that same entrance. What counts is that they have equal status.

This is the Gospel message. Jesus Christ the door gives all persons equal status before God and people. Jesus Christ is the only door to salvation. Jesus Christ the door does not have partitions for males and females, young and old, rich and poor or first class and second class. We all enter through the one and the same door.

Our salvation through Jesus Christ cannot be defined otherwise. Christ came and levelled the ground. He made the mountains to come low, the valleys to rise, crooked roads to straighten and the rough path to be smooth. He has lifted those of lower status and humbled those of higher status. We all enter through the one and the same door.

I love what former United States President Jimmy Carter said about the BWA as recorded in Baptists Together in Christ, published to mark BWA’s centenary:

I am proud to be part of the Baptist World Alliance. One hundred million men and women around the world who never let political values separate us from one another. We see ourselves as brothers and sisters regardless of our ethnic or racial differences or our political philosophies. We are joined together in a common faith, and I am proud to be part of it.

The door makes sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus. We are redeemed by one and the same blood of Christ.

In apartheid South Africa, we struggled against those who created side doors and back windows and denied others entrance through the front door. The church still struggles with issues of equality. Some churches still present Jesus Christ the door with many partitions. We have a sense there is a struggle about equality in the house of God, with partitions for males and for females, for the young and the old. Racial, gender, tribal and ethnic partitions are evils we must fight against and overcome.

As the Baptist World Alliance family we stand on the message that Jesus Christ is the only door by which all people enter to receive their salvation. There is only one door without partitions. There are no alternatives or side doors or back windows.

This is the message we need to bring to our world in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. At Easter, there were three crosses but only one cross was about our salvation. One door and not many. As Ephesians 4:5, 6 says, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all in all.” Amen.
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