Elijah Brown Builds on BWA Legacy

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GIFTS FROM GLOBAL BAPTISTS: STORIES ENGAGING CHURCHES IN CONVERSATION

A podcast from the Division on Mission, Evangelism and Justice (MEJ) of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) hosted by MEJ Coordinator Trisha Miller Manarin

This monthly podcast focuses on the work and ministry of member bodies and churches in the BWA. Our goal is to share stories from our Baptist brothers and sisters around the world, encouraging our churches to consider and explore new ministry possibilities.

BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE
Your Network to the World!
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These last six months have been a further reminder of our interconnectedness. I feel the love of parents who shaped a calling to global mission; of mentors through the years who have challenged and affirmed; and the kinship of a global BWA family filled with gifts, passion and a longing for God’s kingdom. I feel our dependency upon the Lord and upon one another, and your undergirding prayers leading us to a strengthened tomorrow.

At a time when more people face famine and more people live as refugees than at any point since World War II, we have an opportunity to live into this family connectivity. With 35 million members of the BWA family living in contexts characterized by high to very high religious persecution, discrimination and marginalization, I anticipate with you that the BWA will continue to be a leading voice advancing human rights, religious freedom and justice.

I envision with you missional witness remaining a hallmark of BWA commitment matched with ongoing theological education and reflection. With some 1.5 billion people continuing to live in areas where they have less than a 50 percent chance of ever hearing the Gospel and where 30 percent of our BWA member bodies have no Baptist theological educational institution within their country, there is much we can continue to do together.

I join with you and all who have gone before in working to serve the Lord in witness through the BWA family. I believe in our ongoing ability to advance a kingdom focus, celebrate unity within diversity, network resources across partner conventions and institutions and provide ongoing opportunities for a public voice on issues of critical concern, especially in light of mission and justice. I believe the BWA remains a powerful platform proclaiming hope, peace, justice and whole-life discipleship in Jesus Christ.

Would you continue to pray for Amy, myself and our family as we transition? Would you continue to friend me on Facebook (Elijah Brown), connect on Twitter (@ElijahMBrown) and send emails of partnership?

It is deeply humbling to work toward these endeavors with you. Thank you. Thank you for continuing to call each one of us to live into our Kingdom assignments.

"Thank you, BWA family. Thank you for the spiritual leadership you have so often modeled, the investment in the Emerging Leaders Network, the generosity of friendship you have offered through the years and, since the Annual Gathering in Thailand, the flood of emails filled with abundant well-wishing, prayers and support. I am deeply grateful and truly humbled.”

– ELIJAH BROWN
Elijah Brown describes his election as Baptist World Alliance General Secretary as humbling.

“The BWA has such an outstanding history of service in many corners of the world. To be considered for this role was an overwhelming, humbling and deeply exciting opportunity. I’m grateful for the opportunity to partner with goodwill Baptists from around the world.”

His election as BWA general secretary was a surprise. “It was not a position I had sought. I tried to be prayerful and hopeful through the process and see where the Lord would be leading.”

He, however, has confidence in his strong sense of call. “It is a position to which my wife Amy and I feel called. We feel the support and encouragement of many individuals, even when it feels that it is such a large task.”

He is deeply grateful to his predecessor, Neville Callam, “for the support, friendship and generosity that he has shown. I’ve been grateful to meet with him on a regular basis to begin this process of transition. Dr. Callam has been incredibly supportive, has invested in this process and I’m deeply grateful for him.”

Brown is heartened by the support he has received since his election in July at the 2017 BWA Annual Gathering in Bangkok, Thailand. “I’ve been greatly encouraged by the numerous well wishes, emails, calls and Facebook messages from many corners of the world.”

He cites a visit he took immediately after being elected in Bangkok to Myanmar where he was warmly welcomed by the Zomi Baptist Churches.

He also noted a special reception held in his honor in October while visiting Lebanon in his role as executive vice president of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative. Baptists from Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon spent a time of sharing and prayed with and for him.

“Those moments have been deeply humbling and encouraging.”
FORMED FOR MINISTRY

THE TRAJECTORY OF ELIJAH BROWN’S LIFE WAS ANYTHING BUT A GIVEN, but very early on, from about 10 years old, he knew what he wanted to be. At that tender age, Brown began to perceive a call to the Christian ministry.

Though early compared to some other persons, this was not a surprise. “I don’t remember a time before I was a Christian,” he said, recalling his full conversion to the Christian faith at age 4. “During family Bible study I expressed a desire to trust the Lord. I have reaffirmed that on several occasions.”

His father, Patrick Brown, was pastor in a Bible church in deep rural Texas in the United States. The elder Brown took a hiatus from pastoral ministry and the family became part of First Baptist Church Marble Falls in Central Texas.

FORMATIVE YEARS

These were formative years. The youth in that particular group to which Brown belonged were deeply grounded in the Christian faith and the Baptist tradition. Several went on to serve in various areas of ministry.

One is minister of music at Kowloon International Baptist Church in Hong Kong, another is a missionary in Bulgaria in Central Europe, another served as a missionary in Southeast Asia working on Bible translation, yet another served among refugees in Western Sahara in Africa and another was a missionary to Haiti in the Caribbean.

All these come from one congregation in a town of roughly 5,000 people.

Brown credits the influence of the church’s youth minister, Todd Hickingbottom. “I always thought it was the youth minister. I told him that recently and he denies it,” Brown said. “We all went to youth group together. He believed in having a global mindset and encouraged all of us to do that. He took us on mission trips to Mexico every year. Every month the youth minister would meet with us and mentor us, invest in us and ask us to lead the Bible studies.”

His fascination with mission happened just about the time he began sensing a call to the Christian ministry. His father facilitated an interview with a Christian missionary who had visited Marble Falls, which proved highly influential on the then 10 year old Brown. The missionary was based in Geneva, Switzerland, which hosts the second-largest of the four major office sites of the United Nations. “His mission assignment was to reach out to the embassies, strengthen Christians who were stationed in Geneva and to reach out with gospel presentations to ambassadors and their staff.”

That interview helped shape who Brown has become. “My first exposure to what a missionary does is somebody who goes to places of public influence and strives to strengthen discipleship and share the good news of Jesus Christ. In many respects that continues to shape and mold my vision and my understanding of who I am and who we can be as believers.”

His involvement in church deepened when his father reentered pastoral ministry in his mid teen years, taking charge of First Baptist Church, Bertram, in a small Texas town of 900 people. “Bertram had more livestock than it did people.”
Elijah Brown has long expressed a global calling to mission and justice, significantly shaped when he spent eight weeks of summer in Botswana, just out of high school, in 1999. “Africa will always have a very special place in my heart.”

Life and nature in the famed Okavango Delta is captivating. “It left a very deep imprint on who I am today and in my call to mission,” he said. “I loved the land, the environment, the culture, but what I really fell in love with was the people. I loved the people of Botswana, their heart, their love for the Lord.”

No matter how far they went into deep rural Botswana, the church was already there. “It began to foster in me very early on a real awareness that we do live into a global church,” Brown declared. “While there are still many places around the world that have never heard the name of Jesus Christ, we have a real opportunity to partner with Christians around the world and do what we can to support them as they become agents of hope and change for Jesus Christ. That’s what stood out for me from that mission experience—not what we did, but the people we served alongside and the love they had for the Lord.”

Based on his experience in the southern African nation, he concluded that mission work requires the full body of Christ working in partnership. “One of the big lessons I learned was that the real gospel sharers were the translators and the local church that were doing all of the hard work. Mission will always carry the need for us to share the Gospel ourselves. If it can be done in partnership with the local church the kingdom is stronger for it.”

Engagement with Africa helped shape his academic work and professional life. While doing PhD work at Edinburgh in Scotland, he developed a close relationship with a fellow graduate student, Stephen Ter Nyoun of the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. Ter learned Brown was “interested in the intersection of church and state and the way the church can positively influence society in areas of conflict, injustice and persecution.”

Ter, who was vice chair of the New Sudan Council of Churches, told him, “That’s exactly what’s happening inside south Sudan. Nobody is writing on South Sudan. If you come I’ll help make some introductions.”

Ter fulfilled his promise. Brown spent time conducting research in refugee camps in South Sudan (which later gained its independence from Sudan in 2011); in Khartoum, capital of Sudan; at the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, at one time the largest refugee camp in the world; and in Uganda.

What he came across was a thriving church of refugees and other displaced persons. These were among the fastest growing churches anywhere in the globe. “I fell in love with refugees who were striving to honor the Lord, who continued to be bold witnesses in very
challenging contexts, yet so often filled with joy. I gained so much from them.”

The result of all this work was his 2008 PhD dissertation, “The Road to Peace: The Role of the Southern Sudanese Church in Communal Stabilisation and National Resolution.”

Brown’s engagement with Africa still continues. He returned to Sudan, which had experienced civil war, in February 2007. Through facilitation by the BWA, he did groundbreaking work to help unite the Sudan Interior Church (SIC) that had divided into SIC-North and SIC-South. “I met with the SIC-North leaders and visited several churches. One of the hopes they expressed was to reconcile with SIC-South. I took that request back to the BWA.”

With funding and support from the BWA, a meeting was held between leaders of both groups. “At the conclusion of that meeting they reconciled into one governing body again with one set of governing leaders. I was very grateful to the BWA to help support a process that resulted in reunification and reconciliation among Baptist churches inside Sudan.”

In 2013, Brown authored a BWA report on human rights abuses in Eritrea that was cited in a final report submitted by the United Nations (UN) on the state of affairs in the Horn of Africa country. Brown visited and interviewed 19 Eritrean refugees in camps in Ethiopia. The BWA report stated there were between 2,000 and 3,000 religious prisoners in Eritrea, the majority being evangelical Christians. Religious prisoners, the BWA asserted, were frequently beaten and tortured, denied legal recourse and medical aid and were held in deplorable conditions such as in underground cells and metal containers.

The BWA submissions were made during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Eritrea by the UN in Geneva, Switzerland, in February 2014. After the UPR, the UN Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea in June 2014 to investigate the widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the nation, which gained its independence from Ethiopia in 1991 after a 30-year war for independence.

Firsthand testimonies collected by Brown on behalf of the BWA Commission on Religious Freedom were cited in the final UN report. BWA and other nongovernmental organization findings were referred to in the UN report as “testimonies and confidential submissions” that were made to the UN on Eritrea.


Ethiopia is a frequent destination. Brown traveled to and from the country each of the last eight years. “I’ve been to every major city in Ethiopia,” he explained. The trips began while he was assistant professor of Mission at East Texas Baptist University and has continued since he became executive vice president of 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative.

Other countries he has been to in Africa are Djibouti, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe.
THE BWA CONNECTION

The following is an oral account by Elijah Brown of his initial engagement with the BWA

MY INITIAL CONTACT WITH THE BWA CAME VIA THE BAPTIST WORLD CONGRESS when my wife, Amy, and I attended the Baptist World Congress in Birmingham, England, in July 2005. That was my first introduction to the Baptist World Alliance.

We were living on a very limited student budget. Our attendance at the congress was facilitated by my mother and mother-in-law. There were days when it felt that there was more month than money.

One afternoon at the congress venue Amy said, “I have got to have a cup of coffee.”

I said, “We can’t afford a cup of coffee.”

She said, “We will afford a cup of coffee.” I said, “Ok.”

We bought one cup of coffee. There was nowhere to sit. There was a nice looking couple sitting right there. I said, “Why don’t we go and sit with them.”

It was Ken Manley and his wife, Margaret, from Australia.

Ken said, “We’re having a party tonight for Tony Cupit’s retirement as BWA director.”

I said, “Who’s Tony Cupit?”

He said, “It doesn’t matter. Tony loves young people. Why don’t you come?”

Amy and I went to Tony Cupit’s retirement party with Ken and Margaret Manley and met Tony Cupit. Tony was immediately very encouraging to us.

He said, “You should get involved in the BWA.”

Following the Birmingham Congress I emailed, “What would that mean, getting involved in the BWA?”

I was placed on the Commission on Freedom and Justice, since I was working on some of those issues for my PhD.

In 2006 I flew to Mexico City to attend the BWA Annual Gathering. I got to know [BWA director] Alan Stanford who said, “If you ever need a place to stay in DC, come and stay with us.”

The next year I took him up on that offer and spent a week at his house and did research in Washington, DC. He brought me up to the BWA in January 2007. That was my first trip to the BWA building. I met with [then BWA General Secretary] Denton Lotz and talked about my work in Sudan and South Sudan.

I graduated in 2008 with my PhD and got hired that spring at East Texas Baptist University (ETBU). My wife and I moved to Marshall, Texas, and I served on faculty at ETBU for 5.5 years. I was hired as assistant professor of Religion, teaching Mission, Introduction to Old Testament and New Testament and Introduction to Ministry.

The last 4.5 years we lived on campus as faculty in residence and helped to mentor 360 freshmen students. I taught World Christianity in the graduate program with focus on Africa, Latin America and Asia. I helped start a partnership with a school in Ethiopia and took student mission trips there, taught courses on the history of Christianity in Africa and participated in church engagement.

In my last year there I proposed and started the Freedom Center to study and engage international religious freedom, one of the first institutions the university had launched.

In partnership with the BWA Commission on Religious Freedom, the university enabled me to go to an Eritrean refugee camp in Ethiopia. Texas Baptists provided resources for an Eritrean pastor in Texas to accompany me on that trip.

This was a great example of how BWA commissions can make a real world difference—a partnership between the BWA, a BWA member body and a Baptist institution; seeking to live out the longstanding BWA commitment to advancing human rights and justice.

Brown at East Texas Baptist University in 2010 where he was a professor of religion
A COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

FOR MUCH OF HIS PROFESSIONAL LIFE, ELIJAH BROWN HAS FOCUSED ON JUSTICE ISSUES, PARTICULARLY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. He sees himself continuing in that role as Baptist World Alliance general secretary. He believes the BWA is specially placed and particularly suited for this task.

The BWA has several advantages. First, “The BWA is in a unique position to engage in advocacy, training and support for those living in the midst of injustice. It has more than 100 years of history of engaging in these areas. Baptists as a collective community have a 400-year history of championing issues of religious freedom for people of all faiths or those who hold to no faith. The BWA wants to build upon that legacy.”

Second, “The BWA has space at the United Nations (UN) as an accredited organization. That is less common than what many people realize. It gives us an opportunity to be a voice and advocate within the apparatus of the United Nations.”

Third, “The BWA is located just outside Washington, DC, where there are 177 embassies, more than almost anywhere else in the world, except for Brussels, Belgium, (seat of the European Union). The BWA has a unique opportunity to build bridges to all those embassies and be a voice of support, encouragement, dialogue and diplomacy on the behalf of our 235 member bodies.”

Fourth, “We have the resources of Capitol Hill where there are 535 elected representatives—100 senators and 435 members of the House of Representatives. Of those 535 officials, 70 are one kind of Baptist or another. We have an opportunity to use our location to be a voice. Issues of religious freedom continue to be one of the critical issues facing the majority of people around the world and yet it is one of the least engaged areas in terms of justice. As an example, in Washington, DC, among faith-based organizations that do advocacy on Capitol Hill for religious freedom for people of all faiths, the largest team in the city is the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative.”

As Brown sees it, the opportunity is begging for attention. “The space is huge for the BWA to build upon our historical legacy, whether at the UN, the European Union, Washington, DC at Capitol Hill or the embassies; to be a voice for those facing issues of religious discrimination and persecution. We have the legacy, the platform as a true global organization; we are an ecclesial organization with reach into 128 countries. There is almost no other organization anywhere in the world except for a few other ecclesial bodies that have the grassroots network and connection that the BWA has. It is almost unparalleled, the ability we have to listen and be a conduit for a deeper engagement.”

The biblical mandate and imperative is the primary driver. “It is part of our biblical DNA. This is what God has called us to do. From Genesis to Revelation, the scriptures reverberate with the call to stand with justice; from Jesus’ grand manifesto in Luke 4 when he self identifies his own mission and articulates that within the context of justice and Hebrews chapter 13 which uses the command to remember those who are in prison. ‘That word ‘remember’ is the same strong command you find in the Great Commission to go and make disciples. It is a command in Hebrews 13 to remember those in prison. We have this great biblical mandate to live into these issues of justice.”

The responsibility is global. “We have this opportunity to empower one another. It’s not just about the work the BWA can do, but about the work that all of us can do. We can engage in training and support.”

An example of the global reach and impact was demonstrated by an experience in Lebanon. “In October 2017, on my last international trip for the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, we went to Lebanon and hosted a four-day conference that brought 70 church leaders from Syria for a time of prayer, listening and strategic planning, most but not all of whom were Baptists. There are 13 Baptist churches in Syria, nine of which are functioning right now. During one of the sessions we challenged Syrian church leaders to be a voice for those facing imprisonment for their faith. The examples we gave were the two Baptist pastors in Myanmar who are imprisoned. These Syrian church leaders wrote 48 letters of advocacy in Arabic on behalf of two Baptist pastors imprisoned in Myanmar. These letters were delivered to the prison where the two Baptist pastors are incarcerated. Copies were sent to the individual who heads up the legal apparatus inside Myanmar.”

Brown sees that example being replicated several times. “If Syrian Baptists are willing to write letters on behalf of pastors imprisoned in Myanmar, can’t we all do the same? Can’t we live as this great global family who are praying for one another, advocating for and supporting each other, so that we can strive to live according to the kingdom of God and the mission to which God has prepared and called us?”
THE BAPTIST ROOTS OF AMY BROWN, ELIJAH BROWN’S WIFE, GO BACK MORE THAN A CENTURY.

She is from a missionary family, some of whom have been involved in the BWA for decades.

Her maternal great-grandparents, Levi and Ida Lovegren, were missionaries in China when the communists took over in 1949. Their daughter and Amy’s great-aunt, Mildred Lovegren, was a longstanding, career missionary in Hong Kong and Macau, while her brother August and his wife Alta Lee Lovegren, were Baptist missionaries in Jordan.

Levi was imprisoned for five years inside China. His wife, Ida, was put under house arrest. Ida was eventually released and sent to Hong Kong.

Levi and Ida share a birthday. By providence, Levi was released on their birthday. After release from prison, the Lovegrens moved to Taiwan where Levi helped start and taught seminary.

The popular publication, Life magazine, ran a story of Levi’s time in prison.

During her service as a missionary in Hong Kong and Macau, Mildred, affectionately known as Aunt Millie, organized and chaperoned groups of students from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau to successive Baptist Youth World Conferences. She did this well into her 60s.

“She was a very big believer in the Baptist World Alliance,” Elijah Brown stated. “Amy’s family has long been significant believers in the Baptist World Alliance.”

Amy’s mother, Bonnie Evans, had attended the 1968 Baptist Youth World Conference in Bern, Switzerland, and encouraged Amy and Elijah to attend the Baptist World Centennial Congress in Birmingham, England, in July 2005, offering to pay their registration fees. At the time, both were in Scotland where Elijah was reading for his PhD. Elijah’s mother, Jeri Brown, added to the encouragement by offering to cover their transportation costs.

“It was such a joy to be there,” Brown said. “It was a formative moment for our lives, reconnecting us to our calls to ministry and introducing us to the worldwide Baptist family beyond what we had known in Texas Baptist life. It was a profound moment in both of our lives.”

For Amy, being involved in Baptist life touches close to home. It recalls and reconnects her to her own family history. “For me it’s personal. My family has historically followed Christ when it’s hard and at the risk and reality of prison,” she stated. “My husband spends his days advocating for religious freedom now, here and around the world. Religious freedom should be a universal right.”

“IT WAS PRAYING”

— ELIJAH BROWN
LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

AS ELIJAH BROWN TAKES ON THE TASK AS BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE GENERAL SECRETARY, HE INTENDS TO ADOPT A LISTENING POSTURE.

“I intend to listen and learn and see how the Holy Spirit is at work in places around the world, how we can humbly welcome one another into a global conversation, listen alongside one another and serve together. As we sense the Holy Spirit moving in particular areas I anticipate that we will adjust to where the Holy Spirit is at work and calling us forward.”

At the same time, however, he sees the BWA focusing on its strengths and building on its legacy. “I expect that we will strengthen the core of who we are as the BWA while stimulating new initiatives. We will continue to build upon the incredible legacy of more than 100 years, especially of my immediate predecessors, Dr. Denton Lotz and Dr. Neville Callam. We will build on those foundations as we continue to seek who we are as global Baptists in the 21st century.”

Despite that, it is clear that previously existing Baptist groups have seen significant changes within their member bodies; Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, 119 percent; Latin America, approximately 190 percent; and All Africa Baptist Fellowship, 800 percent growth within BWA membership.”

The decline and growth have not been linear. “Some of that is because of member bodies in North America that have left the BWA. In Asia and Africa new member bodies that didn’t exist in 1990 have formed and joined the BWA.”

Despite that, it is clear that previously existing Baptist groups have seen significant changes in membership. “The first story we want to tell of what God is doing is the greatest global expansion we’ve seen in the Baptist family in the past 400 years. We’ve become a true global, worldwide movement, now found in 128 countries and territories around the world. We want to celebrate this incredible growth.”

The second narrative is the contexts of injustice, discrimination and persecution in which millions of Baptists live. “Pew Research maintains the gold standards on regulations related to religious discrimination and social hostilities emerging from religions. They have four categories—low, moderate, high and very high. If you merge what Pew considers the high and very high areas of religious persecution because of legal restrictions or social hostilities with current BWA data, it is at 78 percent. Seventy eight percent of all BWA Baptists living within North America and Europe, the historical areas where Baptists have come from. As recently as 1990, about 85 percent of Baptists came from those two regions. Today it’s down to about 45 percent. There is this rapid shift. In the last 25 years the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship has seen 76 percent growth within their member bodies; Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, 119 percent; Latin America, approximately 190 percent; and All Africa Baptist Fellowship, 800 percent growth within BWA membership.”

The combination of rapid expansion and revival in the context of religious persecution and social hostilities help set the frame within which the BWA operates. “When I realize that almost eight out of 10 BWA Baptists in the world are living within a context of high to very high religious restrictions, that helps frame the way BWA can help build upon its historical legacy.”

The likelihood is that this will continue and may even worsen. “The Holocaust Museum and outside holocaust experts maintain an annual index that considers the likelihood that genocide or significant state-sponsored mass killing or ethnic cleansing could occur, highlighting the countries with greater than 50 percent likelihood where these could occur. If we take that database and merge it with BWA data, 40 percent of all BWA Baptists live in a context there is greater than 50 percent likelihood that their government could sponsor mass killing of its own citizens.”

With such stark numbers, the BWA needs to determine its priorities. “The two great priorities of the BWA is knowing how to come alongside a church that is experiencing its most significant and rapid expansion in the history of the Baptist movement; how to celebrate those Baptists, learn from them, deepen what they are doing with enhanced theological reflection, whether in

PREDOMINANT NARRATIVES

Brown sees three predominant narratives unfolding among Baptists globally.

First, “Baptists around the world are experiencing rapid revival and expansion, perhaps the greatest revival in 400 years of Baptist history. In the last 27 years the BWA has seen about 27 percent increase in growth. That varies region by region in the BWA. When you look at membership data provided by the BWA starting in 1990 to 1995, 2000, 2010 and up to where we are today, there are several interesting trends. Over the past 25 years, there has been a 34 percent decline in BWA membership among North American Baptists and a one percent increase in the European Baptist Federation. Essentially what we are seeing is a flat or negative growth
a local church, Bible institutions or formal institutions of higher learning.”

At the same time, “when so many Baptists live in contexts of injustice, how do we stand alongside them with signs of encouragement, solidarity, messages of hope and works of advocacy?”

Brown notes the youthfulness of the world’s population and what it means for the BWA. “Pew Research tells us that by the year 2020, the same year when we gather to celebrate our congress in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 68 percent of the world’s Christians will be under the age of 45. So we have a rapidly expanding church, a Baptist family that is facing incredible persecution and discrimination and by and large Baptists who are under the age of 45. How do we strengthen these emerging leaders around the world and help them live into the calling that God has placed on their lives?”

The third narrative is the lack of opportunity for theological reflection in certain parts of the BWA family. “There are approximately 362 theological institutions that are affiliated with BWA member bodies around the world. And yet, there are 38 countries in which there is a BWA member body and no institution for theological reflection. That’s about 30 percent of countries in which there is a BWA member body and not even one institution for theological reflection. In some countries where there is a formal theological institution it may not be accessible to all Baptists inside that country for a variety of reasons. It is my hope that we will creatively and prayerfully consider how we can partner with these 362 theological institutions affiliated with BWA member bodies to strengthen the mission they have within their varying contexts. I anticipate that we will explore new opportunities to partner with these institutions.”

BICTE (Baptist International Conference on Theological Education), to be held in the Bahamas in 2019, will provide opportunities to address these concerns. “I encourage all who are passionate about theological reflection to mark their calendars to join us in the Bahamas. In addition to breakout sessions and plenary speakers, we will have a dedicated track to help BWA to move forward and partner with theological institutions.”

Working theme for the current round is “The dynamic of the Gospel and the witness of the church.” Papers presented at Baylor focused on Baptist and Catholic perspectives on God’s revelation in Christ and the witnesses borne by scripture and tradition, as well as the activity of the Spirit in the church and the world.

In announcing the new round of dialogue in July 2016, then BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “The next phase of dialogue ... should have clear continuity with the first two phases and should focus on the subject of common witness to Jesus Christ.”

“We would be pleased to build on these two previous dialogues and explore new areas of discussion,” Cardinal Koch, president of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said in a letter to Callam in February 2016. “These official dialogues were cause for great celebration and gratitude to God,” Koch declared.

Preparatory meetings were held in May 2016 between Baptist representatives with a team from the Catholic Church to consider the focus and methodology for this phase of the Baptist-Catholic dialogue.

The BWA and the Vatican have experienced close cordial relations in recent times, building on the goodwill that emerged out of the first two rounds of dialogues.

In October 2013, Timothy George represented the BWA at the Thirteenth Ordinary General Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church on The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.

In October of the following year, 2014, Valérie Duval-Poujol, a French Baptist biblical scholar, represented the BWA at the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that discussed important issues facing contemporary families.

Roy Medley, retired general secretary of American Baptist Churches in the USA, was a fraternal delegate of the BWA at the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church which took place in Rome in October 2015.

Then BWA President John Upton represented the BWA at the March 2013 inauguration of Pope Francis I.

Baptist participants at Baylor included Frank Rees of Australia, co-chair; Steve Harmon of the USA, co-secretary; Paul Fiddes, United Kingdom; Timothy George and Elizabeth Newman, USA; Glenroy Lalor, Jamaica; Tomás Mackey, Argentina; and Lina Toth, Lithuania.

NICARAGUA ON THE RISE

THE LAST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY WAS TURBULENT FOR MUCH OF LATIN AMERICA. COLD WAR POLITICS COLLIDED WITH MANIFEST DESTINY. RIGHTWING, REPRESSIVE, OPPRESSIVE, DICTATORIAL REGIMES DOMINATED THE REGION WITH STRONG EXTERNAL SUPPORT FROM OTHER GOVERNMENTS.

Three generations of the Somoza family ruled the Central American country of Nicaragua, causing widespread mayhem and dislocation. Two civil wars, one in the 1970s and another in the 1980s destabilized the country.

Nicaragua began its transition to stability in the 1990s. The 21st century has seen a transformation and the nation is going through a kind of renaissance. The economy is strong, the country is politically stable and relatively peaceful and it is attracting investments.

Baptists are among the strongest Protestants throughout Nicaragua and are making a significant impact. Blessed with visionary leadership, most recently by President Felix Ruiz and General Secretary Rodolfo Miguel Moreira, the convention’s various ministries are spreading the Gospel and meeting urgent needs.

HOSPITAL
One of the more notable institutions is the Baptist Hospital in the capital, Managua. Founded in 1930, the 130-bed facility was the first private hospital in Nicaragua and is one of six such private institutions in the country. The hospital serves about 400,000 in and outpatients each year and performs roughly 800 surgeries each month. It employs more than 600 persons, more than 60 percent being doctors and nurses.

In addition to general medicine, the Baptist Hospital operates the second largest dialysis clinic in Nicaragua. Started just three years ago, there are 50 dialysis units with plans to add 50 more by the end of 2018. It meets an urgent need. Though the causes have not yet been scientifically determined, residents of western Nicaragua, the sugar belt, suffer high incidences of kidney disease.

The hospital invests up to US$250,000 annually on social programs. Baptist pastors and their families and residents at the Baptist nursing home receive free medical care. Baptist church members receive medical services at a discount.

The cost for hospitalization for most patients is paid for by the country’s social security.

Like other institutions affiliated with the Nicaragua Baptist Convention, the hospital must be self-sustaining. Like the other entities, it contributes to the convention’s budget and helps to fund evangelism, mission and training.

A total of US$3 million is being invested in expansion. Under the leadership of medical doctor Juan Carlos Solís, the hospital has improved its infrastructure. In addition to the new and expanding dialysis clinic and an intensive care unit, there were investments in new technological equipment for MRI, laparoscopic surgery and X-ray, among others.

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RADIO STATION
The radio station, which began operation in August 1991, is at the forefront of Baptist mission and evangelism in Nicaragua, concerned not only in proclaiming the Gospel, but in promoting Christian and wholesome values and reaching the vulnerable.

The station, though facing limitations, aims to operate at a high level. It has a small staff to broaden coverage across the country while reducing electricity, maintenance and other operational costs. The savings realized will go toward servicing the loan.

SCHOOL
The Baptist school, which celebrated its centennial in 2017, is the oldest Baptist institution in Nicaragua. With 1,500 enrolled students, it runs from preschool right up to high school level. It has 130 full time staff,
about 90 being teachers. The children of staff and Baptist pastors either attend for free or receive scholarships.

Though a private school, it follows a curriculum approved by the country’s Ministry of Education. Sensitive to its mandate, however, the school prioritizes other areas, such as teaching English, which is important in equipping Nicaraguans to function in a global economy. About 40 percent of graduating students are proficient in the language.

Other classes are held in music, singing and swimming. There is a Baptist chaplain and Christian values are taught.

Nearly 100 percent of graduating students go on to university, testifying to the quality of the school’s program and the high regard in which it is held. Some former students who are in the construction sector, such as architects and engineers, have made contributions to the expansion of the school.

SEMINARY

Established 76 years ago, The Baptist seminary has just fewer than 100 enrolled students. It operates six extension centers in other parts of the country that include more than 160 students. While the student body is primarily

Baptist, there are Moravian, Assembly of God and even a few Catholic students, as well.

Like seminaries and theological schools in other parts of the world, it struggles to remain financially sustainable and viable, especially in line with the Baptist convention’s policy that all its institutions be self-sustaining.

It has rethought its approach to training. Formerly offering full time programs, it now conducts classes on the weekend. Whereas the convention previously covered the cost of training classes of students, students now pay at least part of their own tuition cost. Even with this however, the seminary subsidizes the training of its students. What they pay is only a fraction of the real cost of training.

One purpose of the extension centers is to make training more accessible and less costly and to reduce the dropout rate, which has been significant.

Students at the seminary earn a bachelor’s degree awarded by the Baptist university, which approved the curriculum, while the seminary awards its own diploma for a three-year program.

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A MIRACLE OF GOD

He’s been a guerrilla, soldier, economist and company executive. Now he’s the general secretary of the Nicaragua Baptist Convention.

Rodolfo Miguel Moreira’s life has seen more turns than most. He’s been imprisoned, tortured and exiled.

A former Sandinista guerrilla who rose to the rank of a column commander, Moreira joined the resistance movement as a teenager to overthrow the brutal Somoza regime, a family that ruled Nicaragua for more than 40 years through three generations, from grandfather to a grandson whose repressive rule was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands. Opponents were routinely executed. Some were dropped from helicopters into the craters of some of the nine active volcanoes in the Central American country.

Others, like Moreira, were arrested and tortured. His prison was a dungeon built directly under the presidential house in the capital, Managua, where scores of prisoners were held. For five months he was beaten, his fingernails and toenails torn out, his teeth and wrist broken and given electric shocks to his private parts.

In the midst of all this he maintained his faith in God. An academic prodigy, he entered theological seminary when he was just 14 years old, completed a diploma course, and became a pastor by the time he was 16. In the 1970s when Christians in the various countries of Latin America struggled how to respond to brutal, dictatorial, fascist regimes, many felt they could not ignore the repression, the abuses, the arrests, the tortures, the thievery. In Nicaragua, many Christians, Baptists included, joined the struggle.

Most of these regimes in Latin America, including the Somozas, had powerful international backers who supplied money, arms, ammunition, training and logistical support. The Somoza regime fell only when United States President Jimmy Carter, a Baptist Christian, pulled American support from the regime in the late 1970s. “President Carter is very popular in Nicaragua,” Moreira said.

In the last phase of the civil war, in a desperate attempt to hold on to power, the regime firebombed cities and towns across Nicaragua, killing an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 people in the last six months alone.

After the war, Moreira recommitted his life to Christ and the church. But the first Baptist church he sought to join rejected him. “We don’t want any murderers here,” they said to him. A second told him he was destined for hell for having fought in the resistance.

Disillusioned, he joined the army and rose to the rank of captain, serving as the chief assistant to the military chief of staff in the new Sandinista government, which had defeated the Somozas in the brutal civil war. But that was not where his heart was. He was also becoming increasingly unhappy with some of the actions and policies of the new government. “I started seeing things I did not like, such as persecution faced by the church,” he explained.

“Back then there were only three ways to leave the military,” he said. “Death, mental illness or desertion.” One could not resign. Desertion could result in execution and, at best, imprisonment, but he deserted anyway. Fortunately, he had friends high up in the military who spared his life and refrained from punishing him otherwise.

He went into exile in Costa Rica, entered university and completed a master’s degree in economics. In Costa Rica he met his future wife, a fellow student and former Roman Catholic nun. He eventually returned to Nicaragua and was appointed an executive in the Nicaraguan railroad company and was later head of a government-owned import company.

But even though he was earning a good salary, one of the highest in the country, ignoring God’s call became progressively more difficult and burdensome. He finally left his job and went to a church that agreed to accept him as their pastor. From several thousand dollars per month, he was now earning US$32 per month. In the process, he returned to seminary and completed a degree in theology.

Through the years he served the Baptist convention in various capacities by chairing boards of trustees for the Baptist radio station and the school. In 2015, he was elected general secretary, having overall administrative and financial responsibility for the convention, the largest in Central America and one of the strongest Baptist groups in Latin America.

Describing himself as “a miracle of God,” he recounted incidents in his life that kept him returning to his faith and to the church. While in the guerrilla movement, he saw bullets heading straight to his torso divert in midair away from him. On one occasion, the bullets dipped to hit his rifle instead. “Those around me could not believe it.”

Paradoxically, while a teenager, he was saved from hatred and vengeance by a fellow prisoner, an atheist. It was that 60-plus year old man who told the angry youth that he had something in him, that he had something to live for.

The past still lives with him in some ways. As a former Sandinista, he is blacklisted by the United States and cannot travel to or through the US.

But his commitment to Christ and the church is resolute. “I’ve never felt that the Lord has accused me. I’ve learned not to judge others. The Lord has not judged me,” he said. “He was very merciful with me. I don’t think I’ve been worthy of it. The Lord has certainly honored and blessed me.”
EXILE AND RETURN
BY OMAR ALVARADO

I was born 1975 in the midst of the terrible civil war in Nicaragua. Many Nicaraguans wanted to see a regime change. Mom and dad used our house in the city of Matagalpa as a security house for those fighting against the regime. Our parents would hide bullets, ammunition, magazines and homemade bombs in our ceiling. My ma, who was pregnant with my youngest brother, would put these in a plastic bag, place them in a pitcher, fill it with milk and take it to other houses or to the barricades where the young men were fighting the regime. That’s the context I was born into.

In late 1978 Sandinista informants inside the government warned that the Somoza government had found out about my family’s involvement in the struggle. These informants were angels from God. With this information we didn’t take any chances. Entire families were being massacred because of their participation. If the regime couldn’t get you, they would get anyone close to you. Because of the reprisals our family, other relatives and close friends fled the country to Honduras. We put all we could in a sack on our back, whatever we could we put in a bag.

On July 17, 1979, my mother, my older brother and I were in line to get food at the International Red Cross Center. I was four years old then. We were standing in line and waiting with other refugees when one lady came out with a bullhorn and announced that the war was over. On that same morning the Somoza family, who had governed the country with an iron fist, fled Managua.

We didn’t wait for the food. My mother grabbed our hands in excitement and we ran home to share the news with the rest of the family. When we got there it had already been announced on the radio. The celebration was ecstatic. It was an incredible moment; an exciting and very emotional time for us as Nicaraguans. To know that the struggle was over, that we could go home, was incredible. I’m 42 years old and I remember that day like it was yesterday.

We returned to Nicaragua to find a country torn by decades of war but it was a very exciting moment. The Somozas had governed Nicaragua for 47 years. It was a very brutal regime. It was estimated that, in the last six months of the war, 30,000 to 50,000 Nicaraguans died. Entire cities were bombed by the regime.

The country fell into another civil war in the early 1980s. Like many Nicaraguans, my father believed in the Revolution, was willing to defend the Revolution and had joined the army. But as the years went by he saw terrible things happening, the abuses. He rejected membership in the party and started criticizing the things he saw. Back then being a party member was a big deal; if you rejected party membership that would cause problems with the Sandinista government.

My father helped several young men desert the army. There were a lot of young men that had not reached the proper age to join the
army but were being forced into it. That got him into trouble. We were under pressure.

Things were a little different in 1986 than they were in 1978 and 1979. In 1979 we knew the Somozas were going to come for my mom and dad and most likely we would all be murdered. In 1986 it was a different kind of pressure. My father and mother had a small business. He was a tailor and she a seamstress. All of a sudden they had no access to fabrics and materials. It was very difficult to sustain the business and it had to close.

**LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES**

We fled Nicaragua in 1986 and headed for the United States. There was another reason why we left Nicaragua. My father had fallen into deep depression after he came out of the army. He attempted suicide several times, in part due to the things he saw. It was hell living with his depression. He had little patience, incredible anger and deep frustration. I sometimes felt it fell on my shoulders.

My parents and youngest brother got visas but my oldest brother and I did not. I was 11 and he was 13. It was difficult for anyone as young as we were to get American visas because the US believed we would not return to our home country. My brother and I traveled to Mexico, crossed the Rio Grande illegally and arrived in the United States. We ran through the open fields.

Like today, the US had a sanctuary movement where Christian organizations protected immigrants. We ended up in a shelter in Texas run by the Catholic church. There were at least 400 immigrants there. They provided meals and protection from the immigration authorities. We stayed there for about a week, sleeping wherever we could find a spot at night.

We moved to Los Angeles for about six months before traveling to Michigan. There is a sad story in all this. We started visiting a Baptist church in Michigan but we were not welcome. We were the only minority at that church and the rejection was very obvious. We all quit going to church.

In the summer of 1987, a young man in the neighborhood where we lived in the city

of Port Huron invited my brother to play softball for a church league. The condition was that he had to go to church once a week. My brother loved baseball and softball, so he did. My father liked these games as well so he asked if he could play. They said yes but he would have to follow the same conditions.

It was an Assembly of God church. That was our home church for seven years. They looked in on us and helped us go through the legal process of applying for political asylum. That's where dad rededicated his life to the Lord, serving as a deacon. I was baptized in that church as a 12 year old. That's where the Lord called me to ministry.

In 1995, something happened that took us by surprise. After being settled there and waiting on a response from US immigration about our asylum application, we got a letter saying we needed to leave. This took us by surprise. We were not ready but we departed for Canada, which had an open immigration policy. We joke now that God has a good sense of humor. Michigan wasn't cold enough so he took us farther north.

**RETURN HOME**

After a year in Canada, starting all over again, the Lord put a burden on my father's heart to return home to Nicaragua. My brothers and I talked about it. Our parents had sacrificed much over the years, watching over us in the midst of the civil war in the 1970s, leaving the country to protect the family and doing so again in the 1980s; leaving home, family, friends, selling everything, going to these foreign lands and facing all the struggles that immigrants face.

In our hearts we felt at peace about returning home. As I look back I realize there was a purpose in all of this. We returned to Nicaragua in 1996 after a decade to start all over, from scratch. We brought what we could with us on the plane. We had no home, no jobs, but we had family. Family has always been important to us. We came back together as a family: my parents, my two brothers and me. We always thank the Lord for that because wherever we’ve been we were together as a family, facing the challenges and difficulties of life together with the Lord’s help.”

— Omar Alvarado

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LIKE MOST COUNTRIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA, EXCEPT FOR GUATEMALA AND NICARAGUA, Baptist work in El Salvador is relatively weak. Baptist witness began in the country in 1911, when Baptist congregations were organized in the capital, San Salvador, and in Santa Ana.

A strong Roman Catholic presence in the country, the growing strength of Pentecostalism and divisions among Baptists helped thwart Baptist growth and witness. Remuneration of pastors is also a deterrent, with some receiving as little as US$25 per month in stipend. Urgent needs include training and a renewed commitment to evangelism.

Natural disasters have affected El Salvador and have had an impact on Baptist life. In early 2001, a devastating earthquake caused widespread devastation. More than 20 Baptist churches were either damaged or destroyed. In late 2009, heavy flooding associated with Hurricane Ida killed more than 120 persons, causing widespread damage and loss. Among churches affected was First Baptist Church in San Vicente, where several members had died.

Under the leadership of President Sonia Valiente, the Baptist Association of El Salvador (ABES), formed in 1934, is addressing many of the weaknesses.

Most Baptist pastors have not received theological training and a significant number are elderly. ABES, with the assistance of Baptists from Guatemala, instituted modular, seminar-type instructions with classes held at ABES head offices in the capital. After a visit to the country in November 2017 by then Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam, the BWA granted US$15,000 to ABES for training development.

Schism in Baptist ranks resulted in the formation of the Baptist Federation of El Salvador (FEBES). In separate meetings with ABES and FEBES leaders last November, Callam made a plea for unity. “When Baptist groups are divided, they do not achieve as much as if they were united,” he told FEBES Salvador in 1924. The school in Santa Ana included a boarding school for girls. These are among the more highly respected institutions of learning in the nation.

FEBES, whose churches and members live largely in farming communities, are engaged in farming development projects to aid churches and members. “Sixty percent of the Federation’s church membership are brothers and sisters who work as small scale farmers,” FEBES told the BWA. “We are currently undergoing an effort to recover some of our ancestor’s farming techniques which have been lost through the generations and which seek to sustainably care for the earth we’ve been given, including working to recover heirloom seeds.”

Through the Pan y Vida (Bread and Life) initiative, FEBES “supported the creation of greenhouses, home-grown gardens, family farms and small animal farming. This has contributed to the improved diet of families and for some families has been able to guarantee food in times of food scarcity.” Local churches have partnered with the local government in the municipalities of Mejicanos, San Martin, San Marcos, San Miguel, Santa Ana and La Paz, among others.

“When Baptist groups are divided, they do not achieve as much as if they were united ... Could you find a way to work closely with the association? Not as one group, but as two groups working together ... The two of you together will be stronger.”

– NEVILLE CALLAM

Callam gave examples of Baptist groups in the same country cooperating with each other, forming an alliance of Baptists, such as in Caribbean countries Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago. Examples of cooperation include pastoral and theological training, mission, development work and advocacy.

The Women’s American Baptist Home Mission Society helped to found a school in Santa Ana in 1919 and another in San Vicente in 1924. The school in Santa Ana included a boarding school for girls. These are among the more highly respected institutions of learning in the nation.

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“The lessons learned and errors committed strengthen our experience and allow us to improve our commitment to the gospel which offers so much to those in need,” the FEBES leadership stated.
NEW GENERAL SECRETARY FOR ASIA PACIFIC BAPTIST FEDERATION

Vesekhoi (Vee) Tetseo of Japan by way of India is the new General Secretary for Asia Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF).

Tetseo’s appointment was confirmed when he was formally elected during the APBF congress in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, last September. APBF is one of six regional fellowships of the BWA.

He succeeds Bonny Resu of India, who retired after holding the position for more than 20 years.

At the time of his appointment, Tetseo was co-lead pastor of the Okinawa Daiichi Baptist Church in Okinawa, Japan. He is founder and director of Live to Worship Ministries International, which conducts seminars and workshops for worship, music and leadership for churches and Christian groups in Asia.

He has had longstanding involvement in Baptist life globally. Since 2010, he has been vice president of the BWA Youth Department and president of Asia Pacific Baptist Youth. He was worship band leader during the BWA-planned Baptist Youth World Conference in Singapore in July 2013, for which he composed the theme song, “Reach.”

His band also led worship and he composed theme songs for APBF congresses in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2006; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2012; and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2017.

Born in Nagaland State in Northeast India, Tetseo studied English Literature at the Baptist College in Kohima, Nagaland; earned a masters degree in church music, majoring in voice and conducting, at the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary in Baguio City, Philippines; and completed a doctoral degree in worship studies with the Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary.

After pastoral and teaching assignments in the Philippines, he moved to Japan in 2001 to become music teacher at Okinawa Christian School International, where he also served on its board. He became actively involved in Baptist life in Okinawa, serving as chair of the Okinawa Baptist Convention Music Committee and member of the convention’s World Mission Committee.

Tetseo has written or co-authored three books on worship and youth ministry and recorded or produced several musical CDs.

He is married to Ai Nohara and they have three sons, Levito, Kozo and Setsuri.

CHANGE OF NAME FOR NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN

The North American Baptist Women’s Union, a continental union of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department (BWA WD), changed its name to Baptist Women of North America (BWNA).

The change formally occurred at its meeting in Toronto, Canada, from October 19–22.

A new executive was chosen led by newly elected president, TaNikka Sheppard from the state of Ohio in the United States.

Sheppard, a mentor, minister and spiritual leader who engages with teens and young adults, is now a vice president of the BWA WD.
CARIBBEAN BAPTISTS GATHER IN THE BAHAMAS

CARIBBEAN BAPTISTS MADE COMMITMENTS TO ADDRESS ECCLESIAL, SOCIAL AND MORAL ISSUES OF CONCERN to the region during the Mid-Term Assembly of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF) in Nassau, Bahamas, last October.

The 40 delegates from 10 countries and territories are challenging Caribbean Baptists to raise the consciousness of the Caribbean people to the importance of creation care. In light of the susceptibility of the Caribbean to natural disasters due to hurricanes, flooding and other natural phenomena, governments are being urged to establish and enforce more stringent building codes.

With increased incidences of human trafficking, Baptists are reminded to reaffirm the dignity of human life. Countries should ensure that monitoring borders does not violate human dignity.

Churches should protect the most vulnerable, especially children. Baptist bodies are encouraged to educate churches and the broader constituency to recognize the signs of child abuse and molestation and of human trafficking. Baptists should not be shy to cooperate with NGOs and governments to ensure the safety of children.

Special recognition was giving to outgoing Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam, a Jamaican. A citation was read to him and a presentation made to Callam by Karl Johnson, general secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU).

BWA President Paul Msiza of South Africa was a keynote speaker at the assembly. Bible study leader was incoming JBU President Karen Kirlew, the first woman elected to lead Jamaican Baptists.

The CBF Mid-Term Assembly coincided with the annual Baptist Week planned by the Bahamas National Baptist Missionary and Educational Baptist Convention. On October 15, more than 6,000 Bahamian Baptists participated in a festive march through the streets of Nassau, the Bahamas capital.

The 50th anniversary of the CBF will be observed and celebrated during the General Assembly in Jamaica in the year 2020.

CARIBBEAN OFFERS CERTIFICATE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

THE CARIBBEAN BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP (CBF) IS OFFERING A CERTIFICATE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY in collaboration with the Northwestern Caribbean Baptist Theological Seminary (NWCBS) in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands.

NWCBS is cooperatively supported by the Fellowship of Baptist Churches of the Cayman Islands.

Classes will be conducted in three Caribbean locations to be chosen by the CBF, one of six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance. These classes will include intensive sessions over six days, twice per year.

Students are to be recommended by member bodies of the CBF who will be vetted by its Ministerial Training Committee.

The Certificate in Pastoral Ministry includes 12 courses. Up to 12 credits may be transferred toward an online bachelor's degree.

Courses include Old and New Testament, evangelism and mission, worship, preaching and discipleship. Students may also do Baptist history and a course on the church in the Caribbean community.

Scholarship support is offered for room, board and tuition.

ALL AFRICA BAPTIST YOUTH FELLOWSHIP CONTINENTAL CONFERENCE

BY KOFFI SOKÉ KPOMGBE

THE ALL AFRICA BAPTIST YOUTH FELLOWSHIP (AABYF) organized a continental mission conference at Bowen University in Iwo State, Nigeria, from August 2–6.

The theme was “Thus Saith the Lord,” taken from Zachariah 1: 1–7.

Large numbers of young people from the hosts, the Nigerian Baptist Convention Youth Conference, participated.

Among other issues, questions and concerns were raised as to the exact message the Lord is communicating to the young people in this modern, digital and globalized world, as well as who is listening to the Lord in this noisier generation.

Participants were challenged and invited by speakers from Togo, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria and the United States to listen to the voice of the Lord, who continues to speak to his people.

Prince Adoeye Adigun Gbenga of Nigeria was elected AABYF president. He will lead a new executive over the next four years.

Koffi Soké Kpomgbe, from Togo, is immediate past president of the All Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship.
CAMEROON CRISIS
BY GODWILL NCHAM CHIATOH

Cameroon is 70 percent French and 30 percent English. While French Cameroon gained independence on January 1, 1960, English Southern Cameroon, formerly administered as part of Nigeria, had to decide their fate on October 1, 1961, either choosing to join the Federal Republic of Nigeria or the Republic of Cameroon. English Cameroon chose to join the Republic of Cameroon, giving birth to the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961.


English speaking Cameroon makes up two of the 10 regions of the country and has felt marginalized. It is less a minority problem and more of an abolition of the English colonial system in all spheres of life, including education, economics and politics.

The crisis that began November 26, 2016, did not start as a political struggle. Lawyers wrote the government via the Minister of Justice complaining about the eradication of English common law practice and the appointment of French judges and practitioners to English courts and English regions.

Teachers’ trade union leaders had also written to the government complaining that the English educational subsystem was being eliminated. French speaking teachers and lecturers, who did not master the English language, were sent to teach in English schools, changing English courses to French courses, among many other things.

Government ministers gave the teachers no attention, nor did they respond adequately to the problems raised. As a result, the lawyers called for a sit-down strike that has persisted. Many were arrested and tortured.

The teachers’ trade unions followed suit. Since November 2016, the teachers strike caused schools in the English speaking section to shut down. These schools have never fully resumed as the situation took a new political turn. “Leaders of the people” took advantage of the successful teachers and lawyers strike and began asking for a return to the federal state.

Government responded by setting up an ad hoc committee to examine the complaints of the teachers. Though some matters were being resolved, the subject of federation was introduced. The government asserted that the calls for a federation were an attempt to tamper with the state. Insisting that Cameroon was one and indivisible, the government banned the consortium of trade unions that were negotiating with the government and arrested their leaders. Things degenerated from there.

On September 22, 2017, there was a massive turnout of the population in the northwest and southwest, in every town and village. They declared their determination to be a state and hoisted flags of their own state. They gathered on October 1 to celebrate their independence. It was on October 1 that the vote to join French Cameroon took place.

It is more than one year since many people have been arrested, maimed, abducted, raped, tortured and killed. Internet services were shut down in the two English speaking regions.

Some areas are virtual ghost towns. Businesses remain unopened for three days of the week. The economy of the two English regions is built around schools. As a result of the shutdown of schools there are significant economic losses, causing increased economic hardships to the poor.

The death toll since the crisis began is not officially known but many people lost their lives. Private and public properties have burned down.

At one of our Baptist schools, a classroom block of four classes and the head teachers’ office were destroyed by fire. A number of Catholic schools were equally burned down.

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

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FULANI MILITANTS KILL DOZENS OF VILLAGERS IN NIGERIA

At least 55 persons, about 21 of them Christians, were killed by Fulani militants in September and October in Plateau State in Nigeria.

Samson Ayokunle, president and CEO of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), told the Baptist World Alliance that 20 of those killed were Baptists while one was a Methodist.

A mass burial for 19 of the victims was held in Ancha Village, where the first massacre occurred.

“It was a difficult time for us because all the 20 Baptists killed came from the same local village church,” Ayokunle said. “Up till now, our government has not arrested any of the criminals who perpetrated the dastardly act. They appear to be above the law.”

In mid-October, 29 other victims were slaughtered in a school classroom in the Tegwe community in Bassa, a Local Government Area in the north of Plateau State.

Ayokunle said the victims “were sleeping at night when the army went round the community in Tegwe community asking them to come to the local primary school so as to provide protection and cover as the armies used the local school as their operating base. About 24 community member responded and were locked in the classroom by the armed security men.”

According to Ayokunle, the Fulani herdsmen attacked the school and the soldiers “took to their heels, leaving the community members at the mercy of the herdsmen.” Twenty-two victims, most of them women and children, were killed, while two escaped. Another seven villagers in the vicinity of the school were also killed.

Ayokunle, president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the main Christian ecumenical body in the nation, is appealing to “the international community [to] help us cry out to the government of President Muhammadu Buhari to show seriousness in bringing these criminal herdsmen to book.”

He said the “government’s failure to arrest them is simply seen by reasonable people as complicity. We demand justice for our dead brothers and sisters.”

The Nigerian Baptist leader visited the affected areas. NBC; CAN; and First Baptist Church in Garki, Abuja, Nigeria’s capital city, provided assistance to the families of the victims.

Ayokunle alleged that the Fulani herdsmen made attacks in other parts of the local area and no arrests have been made.

Christian villages in northern Nigeria and the Nigerian Middle Belt have had repeated attacks, including from Boko Haram and Fulani militants.

In early 2015, more than 30 Baptist churches and about 2,000 individual Baptists were affected by the Boko Haram insurgency in Nassarawa State and parts of Benue State. Baptists and other Christians were killed, women were raped and farms destroyed.

Other attacks occurred in Adamawa State, which includes the predominantly Christian city of Mubi, and in other states such as Borno, Yobe, Taraba and Bauchi.

In March 2015, Ayokunle asserted that the insurgency in northern Nigeria “comes most of the time through Fulani herdsmen who go about with AK-47 rifles and other sophisticated weapons to kill farmers in their villages when they are fast asleep in the night.”

He alleged that many of the insurgents were from outside Nigeria.

He pleaded for prayer “for the future of the church in Nigeria,” declaring that Christianity is under attack in the country, the most populous in Africa.
HOPE AMONG REFUGEES

BY TRISHA MILLER MANARIN

According to the United Nations, nearly 2,000 South Sudanese refugees arrive in Uganda daily. While many remain in rural parts, a large number travel to the capital city of Kampala where they seek safety, refuge and employment.

“The influx has become the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world. More than 85 per cent of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda are women and children under the age of 18.”

People from South Sudan are not the only refugees arriving in the city. Coming from various countries, refugees flock to Kampala looking for hope. Some were high level government officials, officers in their homeland’s armed services. Some were teachers, doctors and lawyers. Young people were students with hopes and dreams now on hold or perhaps completely forgotten. Running on foot, carrying only what they could manage in their arms, through jungles and deserts, towns and villages, languages as different as Chinese to English, they descend upon the City of Seven Hills.

In the past, these hills, inhabited by particular groups of peoples, are now inhabited by a plethora of newcomers in one of the fastest growing cities in Africa. Kampala’s streets are busy. These newcomers are out of sync in this new land. Many are wondering if there is a future for them in this place far from that which is, or has been, “home.”

Two blocks off the main bustling commercial area of Kansanga is the Centre of Hope. Two buildings spanning a dusty street are filled with sounds adding new harmonies, rhythms and tunes to the Ugandan horizon. Here the students, mostly adults with a large growing teen population and some children, are encountering hope in days of discouragement. There is much diversity found at the center, but there is beautiful unity among the students who might otherwise be hostile toward each other.

They are experiencing refuge from the moment-by-moment trials that have followed them from their homeland to their new land. The Centre of Hope’s purpose – Empowering refugees with educational, professional and personal development opportunities so they can thrive in Uganda and beyond – is fleshed out through their course offerings of English, computer science, business and entrepreneurial education, music, cooking, basic health and Bible study. Support and counseling are offered and lives are being transformed.

The Centre of Hope is staffed by Ugandans and refugees. Some of the first students are now teachers; those who previously knew little English now instruct in their new language. There is much light emanating from students and staff as they find a new family in their new country.

Four of us from the United States experienced the hope and refuge offered. We listened to stories told by people with smiles on their faces as they testified to the incredible refuge they have encountered at the center. Though there were tears and pain too deep for words, many students live in a newfound understanding of life and community. They have new sisters and brothers, aunties and uncles from far-reaching places who would not normally be their friend, let alone family.

Aromas of samosas being fried and cakes being decorated float across the grounds of the center. Taste of Hope provides meals and snacks onsite and caters for a variety of events, as well as selling their goods to the diplomatic community in Kampala.

The whirl of sewing machines can be heard as one enters the compound. Students sew pillows and toys, as well as clothes and finger prayer labyrinths. Lives are being transformed by these skills and relationships that are growing as a result of these opportunities.

Young people are being challenged to dream again! They are creating small businesses and developing strategies. They engage in rhetoric and sophisticated debate on issues and concerns. They make music and laughter, supporting each other as they figure out life in Kampala.

Our small group left Uganda encouraged and eager to continue to share their story. We left Uganda with the imprint of refugees’ hearts upon our hearts. We left Uganda knowing we, too, have sisters and brothers, aunties and uncles from far-reaching places with whom we remain connected by the wonder-working power of God. We left Uganda transformed and eager to be engaged at home and abroad with those seeking hope and refuge.

Trisha Miller Manarin is BWA coordinator for Mission, Evangelism and Justice

3 http://www.refugeehope.org/
THE 2017 ATLANTIC HURRICANE SEASON WAS BUSY AND DESTRUCTIVE. There were 17 named storms, 10 of which developed into hurricanes, making 2017 one of the most active since records began in the early 1850s. It was the costliest hurricane season on record, with preliminary estimates at almost US$370 billion in damage and destruction. It was costly in lives lost, injuries and destruction to property and the environment.

The most devastating hurricanes were Harvey, Irma and Maria.

Harvey formed on August 17 and dissipated on September 3, a category 4 storm at 130 miles per hour. Nearly 100 people are known to have died because of Harvey and it caused nearly US$200 billion in damage. Badly affected areas were the Windward Islands and the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean; Central American countries of Nicaragua, Honduras and Belize; South American countries of Guyana and Suriname; and North American areas, including the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico and southern sections of the United States, especially the states of Texas and Louisiana.

Irma, a category 5 hurricane, formed on August 30 and ended on September 16. It packed winds up to 185 mph, causing more than 130 fatalities and costing nearly US$70 billion in damage and destruction. It devastated parts of the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean, especially Barbuda, Saint Barthelemy, Anguilla, Saint Martin and the Virgin Islands; the northern Caribbean islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Turks and Caicos Islands and Bahamas; and the eastern US, especially Florida.

Maria, a category 5 system with winds as strong as 175 mph, formed on September 16 and dissipated on October 3. Almost 550 died from the hurricane and there was more than US$100 billion in damage and destruction. Parts of the Caribbean were devastated, including US Virgin Islands, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Turks and Caicos Islands and Bahamas; and in Southeastern and the Mid-Atlantic areas of the US.

Large numbers of persons were dislocated. The entire island of Barbuda, which experienced about 95 percent destruction from Hurricane Irma, was evacuated when Hurricane Jose began to bear down on it afterwards. More than 100,000 Puerto Ricans left the US dependent territory for the American mainland after devastation caused by Hurricane Maria.

Baptists responded to the disasters. The Baptist World Alliance provided grant relief to areas affected in the Caribbean and in the US. The Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, made site visits and mobilized response. Baptist groups inside the United States, including BWA member organizations American Baptists USA (ABC USA), the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention, the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), provided response and relief. Other groups, such as American Baptist Men, Texas Baptist Men (TBM) and North Carolina Baptist Men, mobilized teams and resources.

Baptists have moved into the rebuilding phase of the disaster response. American Baptist Home Mission Societies, an affiliate of ABC USA, has announced the “Rebuilding, Restoring, Renewing Puerto Rico” initiative. TBM, which acquired the rebuilding responsibilities of disaster relief from BGCT, began construction work in several locations on the Gulf Coast of the US, running initially from November to end of March 2018.
HEAVY FLOODING IN BANGLADESH
BY DAVID PROTIP CHAKRABARTY

IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2017, MONSOON RAINS TRIGGERED FLOODING ACROSS 32 DISTRICTS IN NORTH, EASTERN AND CENTRAL BANGLADESH. Swollen rivers from India, including Brahmaputra-Jamuna River, poured into low lying areas.

The flood deteriorated the country’s northern regions after these areas were inundated by rain from July through August. This was made worse by the onrush of upstream water, leaving thousands of people marooned. More than eight million were affected.

The heavy monsoon downpour and synchronization of flood-peaks of the major rivers were the main causes of the floods.

There were other underlying causes of the recent floods: A change in the base level of the rivers due to local sea level rise; inadequate sediment accumulation on flood plains; increase in the watershed area due to seismic and neotectonic activities in the region; riverbed aggradations due to siltation and damming of rivers; soil erosion due to unwise tilling practices; deforestation in the upstream region; and excessive development and population growth.

By September, floods claimed 142 lives and affected more than 8.5 million. More than 43,300 hand tub-wells and 2,800 schools were damaged. According to government estimates, about 62,000 hectares of cropland, mostly rice, were “completely damaged,” while 531 million hectares were “partially damaged.”

The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) described the flooding in Bangladesh as the most serious in 40 years. IFRC estimated that 700,000 homes were partially or totally destroyed and up to a third of its terrain—much of it farmland—were left submerged, raising fears of a coming food shortage as the country grappled with a shortfall in staple produce.

By September 12, flood waters had started to recede but there was an outbreak of waterborne diseases, increasing the suffering of thousands of people. An acute shortage of safe drinking water and a lack of sanitation facilities further complicated the situation for people in districts that were flooded since July.

The Health Services deployed almost 3,000 medical teams to address diarrhea, dysentery, fever, eczema, itching and other waterborne diseases affecting countless people in 32 districts. In at least 114 upazilas (a geographical region in Bangladesh used for administrative or other purposes) respiratory infection and conjunctivitis affected many people in the aftermaths of floods. According to the Health Services’ emergency operation center, more than 21,000 were affected by various waterborne diseases.

The Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF) provided relief and rehabilitation in the northern and central pars of the country. Among other things, BBCF distributed education materials to about 1,000 children affected by the floods and emergency food supplements to 250 lactating mothers and their infant children.

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Under the leadership of the Zagreb Malesnica Baptist Church and its minister, Mihal Kreko, and with help of the visiting pastor Reza Ansari from Vienna, Austria, a group of 30 Iranian refugees established the first organized Iranian Christian Community, HAMGAM, in Zagreb, Croatia.

Croatian Baptist Aid and Baptist Church Zagreb, Malesnica, along with the Iranian Christian Community in Zagreb has embraced a group of Iranian refugees in Croatia, who are waiting to have their asylum requests approved by the Croatian Government. All left Iran due to the life threatening religious persecution against Iranian citizens who left Islam and embraced the Christian faith. They all became Christians or sympathizers of the Christian faith by their own decision.

Iran is a signatory member to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which obliges the Iranian government to guarantee its citizens the full scope of “freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” including “freedom to change one’s religion or belief” (Article 18).

However, the Iranian Government punishes Christian converts with persecution, social and religious ostracizing, severe prison sentences and torture. They are frequently sentenced to death.

Although the Iranian Government claims it grants freedom of religion to its citizens, numerous international documents released by a number of religious freedom and human rights agencies claim otherwise. They prove that serious and life threatening forms of persecution follow all discovered or suspected converts to Christianity.

Mihal Kreko, whose local Baptist church has become a spiritual home to Iranian refugees in Zagreb, said:

Croatian Constitution and the Croatian laws are among the most democratic legislations in Europe, and as such they are fully qualified to respond affirmatively to all requests for international protection, including those made on the ground of religious persecution. My church community empathizes with all refugees who are seeking help from Croatia at this time regardless of the religious identity of the asylum applicants.

We recognize that Iranian refugees who embraced Christianity are in the unique situation to be misunderstood by Croatian authorities and disqualified as legitimate asylum seekers. Should this happen, their lives would be in serious jeopardy. We hope, pray and are doing whatever is in our power to see that no one in our Iranian Christian community is sent back to what would amount to certain persecution, even a death sentence for most of them.

In addition to providing a spiritual sanctuary for the Iranian refugees in Croatia, the Zagreb Malesnica Baptist Church is offering refugees practical assistance. These include social help, humanitarian care and legal and integrational assistance such as Croatian language and cultural integration classes. Members of the church are opening their homes to refugees. By doing so they are surrounding them with much needed warmth and friendship.

From the Croatian Baptist Aid Annual Report
PRAYER FOR PEACE IN LEBANON

BY NABIL COSTA

LEBANON IS BACK IN THE NEWS! As Robert Fisk puts it, “Lebanon is always going through the greatest crisis since its last greatest crisis. But this time, it’s for real” (Independent, November 9, 2017). Sadly so!

The general environment in Lebanon has been more positive for the first time for as long as I can remember. Yet, without warning, we received with shock the news out of Saudi Arabia on November 4, of the sudden resignation of the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

The circumstances surrounding Prime Minister Saad Hariri’s unexpected resignation and the mounting suspicion that he was placed under house arrest in Saudi Arabia was perceived by the Lebanese government and people as an attack on Lebanon’s sovereignty.

Lebanon has often been described as a “country divided,” but it seemed to have united in response to Saudi Arabia’s strange actions, calling on Saudi Arabia in a unified voice for the return of Prime Minister Hariri.

We seek your prayers for the regional and global powers, which repeatedly attempt to draw Lebanon into a proxy war. “I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

We do not want another war in the region, nor can we handle more pain and suffering in our country. Already, one in three people in Lebanon is a refugee.

Lebanon has an important and strategic role as the gateway to the Middle East. The church has an inviolable role in Lebanon and beyond.

We see encouraging fruits and outcomes of the ministry of compassion that the church is leading amongst vulnerable families and individuals affected by the Syrian war.

What a blessing to come alongside partner churches and enable their congregations to grasp the opportunity to be the church in their communities. This is what keeps us going. With God’s grace we keep our eyes focused on the Author and Finisher of our faith and pursue our mission to be salt and light, carrying hope to the broken and the lost that they too may lift up their eyes and realize their value in his eyes.

Please pray for our country. Pray for God’s protection against plots to bring about havoc and uncertainty in Lebanon again.

Nabil Costa is chief executive officer of the Lebanese Society for Educational & Social Development and a former BWA vice president.

73 BAPTISMS IN ISRAEL IN 2017

BY BADER MANSOUR

There were a record number of baptisms registered in Baptist churches in Israel in 2017, with 73 persons baptized.

Almost all local churches perform their baptismal services in the Jordan River, where John the Baptist baptized our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The majority of these outdoor baptisms is done in the warm season and is usually followed by a church picnic close to the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

The church with the largest number of baptisms in 2017 was Cana of Galilee Baptist Church with 12 people obeying the Lord’s commandment, while Shafamer Baptist Church had 10 and Kufur Yaseef Baptist Church had nine baptisms.

Bader Mansour is development officer for the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel.
A SPECIAL PERSON
BY BADER MANSOUR

Majeda Farah is a special person in many ways. She is creative, diligent, a devoted Christian and a person with special needs.

Majeda is a member of Kafr Yasif Baptist Church. Almost eight years ago she joined Nazareth Evangelical College seeking to have a better and deeper understanding of the Word of God. By the time Majeda finished her undergraduate studies, she had become involved in prayer ministry in her home church, as well as an online ministry.

In 2013 Majeda and her sister, who also has special needs, established a nonprofit organization to serve other people with special needs in their town. Through this ministry she creates a social framework where they are offered fellowship and Christian counseling, as well as practical courses such as in computer and English as a second language.

After her graduation, Majeda was determined to continue her studies at Nazareth Evangelical College and she now participates in the master’s program in Ministry Leadership.

She says this program helps her to broaden her horizons for ministry and equip her to serve the Lord in a better way. It also gives her wisdom in making the right decisions in her ministry and life.

Bader Mansour is development officer for the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel.

THANKSGIVING IN UKRAINE
BY PAVEL UNGURYAN

On Sunday, September 17, Ukraine saw an amazing unity of Christian churches and ordinary Ukrainians who came together for the first Thanksgiving Day in Kiev.

During the evening program at Khreshchatyk Street near Maidan, approximately 200,000 people gathered to express gratitude to God and lift up prayers for Ukraine.

The event was broadcasted to nine countries. The last time the streets of Kiev saw such crowds was when people came to protest during the Revolution.

Throughout the day there were play zones, recreation areas, fairs, exhibitions, various presentations and musical performances on the main street.

International guests, politicians, celebrities and religious leaders participated in the main Thanksgiving concert that featured the testimony of the world renowned speaker, Nick Vujicic. Despite the fact that Nick was born without legs and arms he became a successful writer, businessman and speaker.

Many orphans and Ukrainians with disabilities, including veterans of war in the east of Ukraine, attended. Several thousand people committed their lives to Jesus.

The celebration was made possible when the president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, signed a decree calling for a national celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

Our God is a big God who does amazing things. We are thankful God is leading Ukraine through Reformation to revival.

Pavel Unguryan, a member of the Baptist World Alliance General Council, is a parliamentarian and deputy minister of the environment in the Ukraine government.

Nick Vujicic, left, addressing the large Thanksgiving Day gathering in Kiev

Approximately 200,000 people gathered to express gratitude to God and lift up prayers for Ukraine
The name of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.—much like the name of German monk Martin Luther—remains quickly recognizable. However, King’s birth name—Michael King—does not bring the same level of familiarity.

How did Michael King, Jr. become Martin Luther King, Jr.? That answer involves a meeting of the Baptist World Alliance just as Adolf Hitler took control of the land of Protestant reformer, Martin Luther.

In 1934, the BWA held its fifth Baptist World Congress in Berlin, Germany. Delayed a year due to economic woes, particularly as the Great Depression intensified in the United States, controversy about the location emerged after the rise of Hitler in 1933.

Although some Baptists wanted to move the venue due to the already-evident anti-Jewish agenda of Hitler, the BWA leadership decided holding a meeting in Berlin could provide an opportunity to showcase Baptist unity with German Baptists and offer a strong message about Baptist convictions.

On the latter account, the BWA did offer a prophetic message condemning the very racism motivating Hitler’s regime. The BWA’s resolution on “Racialism,” noted that “this Congress deplores and condemns as a violation of the law of God the Heavenly Father, all racial animosity and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews, toward coloured people or toward subject races in any part of the world.”

The resolution called for “respect for human personality regardless of race” and quoted Galatians 3:8 about there being “neither Greek nor Jew.”

In his new book on Baptists, Jews and the Holocaust, American Baptist Churches USA General Secretary Lee Spitzer argues the 1934 resolution “deserves a place alongside the universally acknowledged Barmen Declaration.”

While the BWA resolution offered a “forthright defense of the general Jewish population and their civil rights,” Spitzer noted, the Barmen “ignored the issue” to instead focus “on the right of the German church to choose its leaders without interference from the state.”

“Karl Barth’s ‘nein’ might be legendary and famous,” Spitzer added, “but the Baptist ‘no’ to anti-Semitism, declared in the German capital with the Nazi government watching, was more comprehensive.”

Also watching was an African American pastor named Michael King, Sr. Then pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States, he traveled to the Congress after visiting other places in Europe and the Middle East.

He was so impressed by what he learned about the German reformer during the trip that, after returning to the US, he changed both his name and the name of his five-year-old son. He became Martin Luther King, Sr. and “Little Mike” became Martin Luther King, Jr. In a sense, a trip to a BWA meeting led to the “birth” of Martin Luther King, Sr. and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Five years later, “Daddy King”—as the elder MLK became known decades later after his son’s prominence—chaired the Local Arrangements Committee for the next Baptist World Congress, which was held in Atlanta in 1939. That meeting, which was held in the Jim Crow South, was perhaps the first fully-integrated meeting in the racially-segregated city.

A few decades later, Martin Luther King, Jr. personified the vision of the Berlin and Atlanta BWA gatherings as he marched arm-in-arm with white pastors and Jewish rabbis to advocate for racial equality and civil rights.

As he did so, he once again associated the name “Martin Luther” with reformation, bringing religious and political changes.

Brian Kaylor is associate director of Churchnet, editor of Word&Way, vice chair of the BWA Communications Committee and a member of the BWA Awards Committee and the Commission on Christian Ethics. This article first appeared in Word&Way; reprinted with permission.

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Although some Baptists wanted to move the venue due to the already-evident anti-Jewish agenda of Hitler, the BWA leadership decided holding a meeting in Berlin could provide an opportunity to showcase Baptist unity with German Baptists and offer a strong message about Baptist convictions.”

— BY BRIAN KAYLOR
CONFRONTING DESPAIR WITH HOPE

BY WADO SAW

The following is an edited and excerpted presentation during the Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering in Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2017.

GREETINGS FROM THE KAWTHOOLEI KAREN BAPTIST CHURCHES

in refugee and internally displaced people camps along the Thai-Myanmar border.

The Gospel has spread to an unlikely group of people: the exiled and the dispersed Karen people in the midst of severe persecution. This group of people believes God called them to be the evangelists of not just Burma (Myanmar), but bearers of the Gospel to every nation.

The life of a refugee, an illegal migrant or irregular migrant, an asylum seeker, an Internally Displaced Person, is flooded with fear, frustration and uncertainties.

With tears in our eyes, we are being dragged and tortured. We feel powerless. Justice has gone crazy. We’re confused. We are at the lowest ebb. Sucked deep into poverty, marginalized and ignored. Hopes, dreams, courage and enthusiasm are trampled to the ground; not wanted; held in low-esteem; familiar with pain caused within and without.

How shall we sing a song of freedom when freedom is shackled and chained? How shall we sing a song of hope when hope is in a Pandora’s Box? When shall we sing a song of joy when joy is behind a large, thick wall?

The weight of despair is heavier than life itself. Some people tend to choose death. Death is more desirable than life. When the weight of despair becomes heavier than the will to remain alive, the future becomes too remote. Some choose death. Death is liberation. The present is suffocating and the future is at a crossroads. For some it is a dead end.

What we have at our disposal is a theology of the exiled, the crucified (Jürgen Moltmann), the executed (Mark Taylor) God. Our hope is in God. Moltmann and others remind us that the God of Jesus Christ—though risen and living, powerful, grace-full, liberating and reconciling, salvific—is the one who was also crucified.

We find solace and transformative power in the poverty, lowliness and abandonment of Jesus Christ. In him we find the “power of God as grace among the rejected.” We experience the pain of God in our suffering, the hope for a better and desirable future in the God of all possibilities. It takes much courage and guts to say, “Thank God for the experiences of the persecuted Christians.” It takes a lot of courage for me to say hope is alive in the midst of extreme distress and in the alarm zones.

Thus, the future is bright in GOD. The future is blessed. Hope is alive! I feel it deep in my heart. We shall overcome, one day. The future is as bright as the promises of God. I have hope. Hope is where action for change and transformation can be ignited. Hope is where actions for newness can be kindled. A Korean songwriter says, “Hope is a dream that does not sleep.”

Emily Dickinson witnessed a long time ago, “Hope is the thing with feathers … that perches in the soul. And sings the tune without the words. And never stops at all.” In hope, we spring into action. We suffer, we pray, we struggle to construct a bridge to the imagined future of peace and freedom. We act on that hope. We will continue to stride in this common journey of hope. Hope expressed in action.

Professor Moltmann said liberating actions must be present, firstly in the struggle for “economic justice against the exploitation” of man and woman. Secondly, actions for change and freedom must be present “in the struggle for human dignity and human rights against the political oppression” of man and woman. Thirdly, there must be actions for positive change “in the struggle for human solidarity against the alienation” and discrimination of one human being from another. Fourthly, action for liberation must also be seen “in the struggle for peace with nature against the industrial destruction of the environment.” And lastly, action of solidarity and sympathy must be present “in the struggle of hope against apathy in asserting the significance of the whole in personal life.”

The struggles continue for you and for us. Martin Luther was right:

This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth into righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road; all does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.

Helen Keller said, “Life is full of suffering but it is also full of the overcoming of it.” As we struggle to make sense of life and, most of all, to overcome the godforsaken situation in the name and the power of the crucified God, I know deep in my heart that one day we will overcome, we shall overcome.

Adoniram Judson once said the future of Burma is as bright as the promises of God. Brothers and sisters, leaders, join with me in this conviction that the future of the Karen [people] is bright because the night is going to be over soon. Believe with me, pray with me, join with me in this struggle to see oppression lifted. I feel it deep in my heart. Christians in refugee camps, in internally displaced areas, will see a desirable future.

Please continue to pray, continue to speak about us and on behalf of us. Come and share the suffering with us. Cliff Richard said, “It’s a drop in the bucket, I can hear you say, I know you will fill it someday, one day.”

I believe so! We will fill it someday, one day. We will get there if we all collectively as a people of faith, faith in the Almighty God, hold on to this hope together. We will continue to pray, we will continue to cry, we will continue to suffer, we will continue to go through crossroads, we will continue to wait and we will continue to hope.

God bless you all and God bless the communion of Baptists around the world.
BELIEVING AND BELONGING WITHOUT BEHAVING
BY BOB TERRY

THE HEADLINE PHRASE ABOVE WAS POPULARIZED BY BRITISH SOCIOLOGIST, GRACE DAVIE. It is used to describe people who profess a religious faith but whose practice indicates otherwise.

Most recently, the catchy phrase was used to describe the dramatic increase of religious faith in Russia and the 18 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the term might be equally applied to Christians in the United States.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox Christian faith has experienced a dramatic resurgence in popularity. Being an Orthodox Christian is equated with national identity in several Central and Eastern European nations such as Russia, Serbia and Greece. That is part of the reason that 10 of the 18 countries in this region count large majorities of Orthodox Christians among their population and 57 percent of the total population of the area identify as Orthodox Christians.

Support of the basic teachings of the Orthodox Church is strong in these countries. A recent study by the Pew Research Center indicated 91 percent of Orthodox Christians in the area of believing in God. Fifty-four percent described the Bible as “the Word of God.”

HEAVEN AND HELL
Orthodox Christians also reported a strong belief in heaven and hell. Belief in heaven was affirmed by 61 percent of respondents and belief in hell by 58 percent.

Religious practice is another matter. Although nine out of 10 believe in God, only one in 10 attend church on a weekly basis. About one in four pray on a daily basis (28 percent) and fast during holy times such as Lent (27 percent).

Still fewer read the Bible outside of church at least monthly (17 percent) and a similar percentage share their faith or views about God with others at least monthly (17 percent).

Pew researchers noted the difference in religious practices between Orthodox Christians in Eastern and Central Europe and those of other religious groups who hold similar beliefs. The conclusion was that, for the Orthodox, behaving did not always reflect “believing and belonging.”

In the United States, one finds similar patterns. For example, 89 percent of respondents here reported belief in God in a 2016 Gallup study. That number was up from 86 percent in previous years but the general trend has been slightly downward since the 1950s and 60s, when up to 98 percent of respondents said they believed in God.

Likewise, belief in the Bible as the Word of God is down since 1976, Gallup reported. That year, 83 percent of respondents called the Bible either literally true or the inspired Word of God. According to the May 16, 2017 report, only 71 percent of respondents now affirm that belief.

Unfortunately, the percentage that rejects the Bible as God’s Word has doubled during that time frame from 13 percent to 26 percent.

Belief in heaven and hell is strong in America, Pew Research reports. Among all respondents, 72 percent believe in heaven and 58 percent believe in hell.

When that is broken down by faith groups, 88 percent of evangelical Christians believe in heaven and 82 percent believe in hell.

Interestingly, historically African-American Protestants have a stronger belief in heaven than do evangelicals—93 percent to 88 percent.

It is incongruous that about 25 percent more Christians called reading the Bible part of their Christian identity than actually read the Bible on a weekly basis.

Only 35 percent of all respondents reported reading the Bible at least weekly and 45 percent reported seldom or never reading the Bible.

When it comes to sharing one’s faith, four out of five believe it is a Christian’s responsibility.
However, only two out of five report having ever attempted to do so.

A Pew study did note the growing presence of Christian witness online, where 50 percent of religiously unaffiliated adults reported seeing postings about faith in God online.

Again the studies show believing and belonging are strong. Unfortunately, behaving in ways consistent with believing and belonging is not so strong.

**LOVING GOD**

The apostle John wrote in his first epistle, “Let us not love with word or with tongue but in deeds and truth” (1 John 3:18). His words are about loving others but they apply equally to loving God.

We can believe all the right things and belong to the right church, prayer groups or what have you. But unless that love for God is lived out in “deed and truth,” they are just empty, meaningless words.

Believing and belonging are supposed to result in behaving. When they don’t—whether in the Orthodox faith or for an evangelical Christian—then our own hearts condemn us because we have known to do good and have chosen not to do it.

May God forgive us when that happens.

*Bob Terry, editor of The Alabama Baptist, is a member of the BWA Commission on Religious liberty, the Communications Advisory Committee and the Resolutions Committee. This article first appeared in the July 20 edition of The Alabama Baptist; reprinted with permission*

**HARRISON TAYLOR PENDLEY**

of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) in the United States and a past member of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Church Leadership, died on September 16. He was 98 years old.


Upon retirement from the BGCT, he and wife, Dora, helped to establish more than 100 new congregations in Australia. They also helped to plant new churches in Spain, Brazil, Peru and Mexico.

He was honored in 2011 with the Innovator Award for Creativity in Mission, a special recognition of his leadership in the establishing of new churches and missions.

He was a member of the BWA Commission on Church Leadership from 1990–1995.

Pendley was predeceased by wife, Dora, on February 18, 2016, after 76 years of marriage. He leaves children, LaRue and Janice.

Funeral service was held on September 23 at Shiloh Terrace Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas.

**BOOKS**

**NICK MEGORAN,** *Warlike Christians in an Age of Violence: The Evangelical Case Against War and For Gospel Peace*, Wipf and Stock, 2017

The book argues that Christians should be against war and military participation, and instead creatively make peace in the power of the Holy Spirit. With examples from around the world, it draws heavily on Baptist traditions, especially Martin Luther King, Jr. and C.H. Spurgeon.
In August 2017 I was invited by Hungarian Baptists to their 4th Hungarian World Congress. The event was attended by delegations from Hungarian Baptist Churches, Mabavisz in Hungarian.

The congress was preceded by the Youth Conference, where an estimated 400 young people attended. It was a privilege and a delight to be in that worship service and share the word of God. Most of these young people stayed after the conference to attend the congress. Some youth leaders participated in the running of the program of the main congress.

The main feature in the opening service was baptism, where there were a good number of young people. This was a moment of special celebration, especially with talk of young people being absent from church. There is another story to be told about young people putting their faith in Christ. This is what I witnessed in recent visits to Chile, Hungary, South Korea and Egypt.

The other part of the story is the millions of young people who do not want to associate with the church. Some come from devout Christian families. There is something driving them away and the church must find out what. But I wish to focus on those young people who are finding hope in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

At a revival service at our local church in 2016 we were elated when, one evening, about 20 young people responded to the altar call to give their life to Christ. The church had baptisms in February 2017 and again on the Easter weekend. We use an outside swimming pool for baptisms. Most times the water is cold. During the baptism I interact with the candidates to help them relax and focus on this important step in their lives. Some candidates are scared of water. When I talk to them they whisper, “I can’t swim so please hold me and do not leave me in the water.” I assure them that all is going to be well.

There are candidates who express gratitude for having committed their lives to Christ. I enjoy these quick talks just before I put them under water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

On Easter Saturday there was this young person who was very relaxed. I talked to her about this step in her life while the congregation sang. She responded like a typical young person. She looked at me with a smile and said, “It is just cool.” This is the language of the youth: being cool means something is great and acceptable, it is what they love to do.

Young people are still cool about being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The challenge is for the church to discover what makes young people be at home in our churches. We need to engage young people, both in our churches and our communities and let them help us reach their peers. There is something we are missing. We are battling the mindset that says the church belongs to adults, that it is adults who must run church. We have an obligation to reach young people because they are ready to put their faith in Christ and be part of the church family.

I had another wonderful privilege participating in the baptism of new believers in Cairo, Egypt. I joined local pastors to baptize a good number of new believers, including several young people.

This is confirmation that the Holy Spirit is touching young people and bringing them to faith in Christ.

In the context and the language of the youth of today, it is cool to put their faith in Christ and to be baptized in water in His name.

To God be the glory.

“...The challenge is for the church to discover what makes young people be at home in our churches. We need to engage young people, both in our churches and our communities and let them help us reach their peers. There is something we are missing. We are battling the mindset that says the church belongs to adults, that it is adults who must run church. We have an obligation to reach young people because they are ready to put their faith in Christ and be part of the church family.”

— Paul Msiza
How to Give

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bwanet.org/resources/baptists-in-prayer

**STAY CONNECTED**
BWA newsletters, mobile app, @TheBWA, the_BWA (Instagram) @TheBWA (Twitter) Groups/bwanet (Facebook)

**GIVE IMMEDIATELY**
by check, money order, wire transfer, credit card, online or through Twitter (@TinyGive)

**GIVE TALENTS**
services, or tangible gifts (gifts in kind)

**GIVE PASSIVELY**
(smile.Amazon.com and www.goodsearch.com choose Baptist World Alliance)

**PLAN**
a later gift of money or property from your estate

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