Refugee Churches

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BWA BEGINS GENERAL SECRETARY SEARCH

THE SEARCH HAS BEGUN for a new general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance. The position becomes vacant as of December 31, 2017, following the announcement by Neville Callam in November last year of his intention to retire as BWA general secretary after 10 years of service.

The general secretary serves the BWA as the chief executive officer; is responsible to the General Council and Executive Committee; and provides spiritual leadership in the global relationships among BWA member conventions, unions and associations.

Duties include vision creation, financial oversight and leadership of the BWA staff. In consultation with the president of the BWA, the general secretary plans the meetings of the Executive Committee and General Council.

The general secretary provides leadership relating to the larger Christian community and other global faith traditions.

A qualified candidate will have an evident personal relationship with Jesus Christ, be a competent administrator, a compelling speaker and writer and an effective fundraiser.

A more detailed job profile and a nomination form are available on the BWA website at www.bwanet.org.

Nominations are being received until April 30, 2017, and sent to:
Rev. Dr. John Upton
Baptist General Association of Virginia
2828 Emerywood Parkway
Richmond, Virginia 23294 USA
Email: John.Upton@bgav.org

CIRCULATION STATEMENT

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ERON HENRY, EDITOR
How Genuine is Our Discipleship?

Often, when we hear Christians taking a public stand on an issue of public policy we can discern something of the quality of their discipleship. The recent round of discussion on immigration around the world provides a case in point.

Was there a distinct difference in the way followers of Christ spoke about immigration? And was this distinctness the result of our faith?

God and others. Yet, is our frequent ranting and raving against immigrants partly a sign of the church’s failure to bear clear and bold witness to what the Bible teaches in our discipleship program?

We cannot throw our hands up in the air when we hear Christians taking a position on an issue but reflecting little or no appreciation for biblical teaching related to the matter. Whether the matter under discussion is an executive action introduced by a United States president or a government quietly changing a policy that protects fatherless little children who find safety in the United Kingdom, do we not need to let our speech reflect the depth of the love that God has shown us in Jesus and calls us to show to others?

The European Baptists’ declaration on the migrant crisis is entirely true to the Scriptures, which their resolution cites appropriately. Meeting in Sophia, Bulgaria, two years ago, they recalled “with hope and joy, God’s love, grace and compassion for every human being revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and experienced through the power of the Holy Spirit.” They remembered “God’s command to receive and welcome the stranger.” They prayed “for wisdom to be entrusted to governments … and for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower the Church – to live out the message of Jesus Christ.” They urged people to “challenge non-biblical attitudes, including rejection of the stranger, which deepen and create harmful divisions and limit compassionate and humanitarian aid towards migrants.” They also reaffirmed, “with hope, the pilgrim identity of Christian faith and the heavenly citizenship of Christians in God’s creation.”

If only we could live consistently in the light of the faith we believe, what a difference this would make in our world! Oh that more Christians would share “the milk of human kindness.”

Take Baptists, for example. Many of us, like enthusiasts of other faiths, love to say that we are “people of the book.” The opinion we take on issues of life, the attitude we exhibit when considering thorny issues of public policy and the conclusions we arrive at when these issues are under consideration are guided by teachings found in the sacred Scriptures of the church. Do we not say: “We take our cue from the life and teaching of Christ?”

Yet, the way we express our convictions about immigrants often betrays the absence of seriousness that attends our pious claims to be “people of the book.” Too often, our speech reflects a lack of respect for the integrity of those about whom we speak. We appear not to remember that God made them, too. And we seem to forget that they were made in God’s image. Our speech lacks the ethos of people who have learned to love others. Furthermore, the convictions we express also betray our readiness to reject, or to conveniently set aside, the teaching of Christ.

Isn’t it hard to sit and listen to Christians trading in hateful and disrespectful speech when discussing the plight of immigrants who reside in a country where they did not gain legal entry, who are residents with status recognized in law and who seek entry as they flee their home country where their life is greatly endangered?

Jesus’ double command of love echoes down the centuries. Sometimes, we hear preachers explain it and other biblical texts that emphasize the duty to love God and others. Yet, is our frequent ranting and raving against immigrants partly a sign of the church’s failure to bear clear and bold witness to what the Bible teaches in our discipleship program? – NEVILLE CALLAM
Displacement and forced migration happen because of conflict, war, social upheaval, famine and extended and extensive environmental degradation.

Christianity, from early in its history, was often a salve to the displaced. It provided hope, meaning and purpose. It gave encouragement and helped to create bonds in community.

In recent years, the Baptist World Alliance has received into membership several organizations that had their genesis in refugee camps. These include the Community of Christian Churches in Africa, based in Rwanda, which was founded in refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and both the Baptist Convention of South Sudan and the Faith Evangelical Baptist Church in South Sudan, which were founded by Baptists who had been refugees in Kenya and Uganda.

Others such as Karen Baptist Churches in the USA, Chin Baptist Churches USA and Zomi Baptist Churches of America are communities of refugees in the United States from out of Myanmar.

Established Baptist unions in Europe such as in Sweden, Germany, Norway, Poland and elsewhere, include affiliated churches comprising refugees, or with a large refugee community in its membership.

This issue of Baptist World profiles a few of the groups of churches that grew out of refugee displacement and established Baptist unions that include a growing cohort of refugee membership.
REACHING REFUGEES IN GERMANY
BY THOMAS KLAMMT

During the 1990s several refugee groups came to Germany from Vietnam, Congo, Ghana, and Tamils from Sri Lanka. They were mostly forced to flee their countries because of civil wars or political oppression. They applied for asylum and started churches in their language groups. As they needed places for worship, Bible study and prayer, they approached German churches. Many were welcomed by Baptist churches. They rented rooms or became affiliated churches, branches or the like.

The Department of Home Mission of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany (BEFG) became aware of the growing number of “international churches” and began supporting their ministry, especially their legal status, administrative challenges and integration into German society. In 1998 the International Mission in Germany was established with a contact person for these churches.

Over the last 20 years, about 15 of these churches became full members of the BEFG. Most are small congregations of 20 to 80 members from the same country of origin, worshipping in their home language. They reach out to their fellow-countrymen but struggle to adjust to the German culture. One major challenge is the adjustments necessary not only for reaching out to other groups and German locals, but to remaining relevant to their own second and third generation who have grown up and received their education in Germany. This works well when the younger generation is allowed to take responsibility in leadership and when Sunday school and worship are using German, at least as a second language. Sometimes the challenge is met best when the migrant church becomes part of a larger German congregation, which also needs to learn to open up for a more multicultural fellowship and worship.

Soon the need for accreditation of the pastors of international churches emerged. Under the leadership of Regina Claas, BEFG general secretary from 2003-13; and Michael Kisskalt, leader of International Mission (IMD) from 2003-15, the Baptist union developed a training program that allows these leaders to receive contextual theological training and integration into the BEFG. The Program for Pastoral Training and Integration (PIAP) started offering a three-year-course in 2010. It has since qualified about 25 international leaders, 17 of whom have already been ordained as pastors with full accreditation in the BEFG. The new PIAP course started in September 2016 with 16 students, seven from Iran and Afghanistan.

This reflects the more recent refugee movements to Germany. For several years now the country has received refugees from North Africa, and the Near and Middle East. There is a major movement of Persian-speaking people to become Christians and join Protestant churches.

As the new leader of IMD, I discovered that at least 100 German Baptist churches have baptized believers from Iran or Afghanistan. At least 10 churches have welcomed more than 20 new members from this movement.

They face many practical challenges, ranging from the need for translators, Bible study materials, legal questions about the asylum process, practical needs for accommodation, education and jobs. The BEFG leadership (presidium and departmental leaders) has sent out a message of encouragement to the churches in January 2017. I organized regional conferences to support and network this movement, called German-Persian Church Development.

“The Department of Home Mission of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany (BEFG) became aware of the growing number of “international churches” and began supporting their ministry, especially their legal status, administrative challenges and integration into German society. In 1998 the International Mission in Germany was established with a contact person for these churches.”

– THOMAS KLAMMT
The IMD has been strongly encouraged by recent developments in the BEFG. The union’s theme for 2015-16 was “Colorful church – Celebrating Diversity.” The National Assembly elected Alfred Aidoo, a Ghanaian-born pastor in the New Life Church Düsseldorf, into the BEFG-leadership in 2015.

Many churches are involved in social ministries and refugee help, as well as in evangelism, offering Bible courses, baptism classes and more.

The refugee or migrant churches have their own networks and mission and development projects, especially for their home countries. But they are finding their place more and more as part and members of the BEFG with its growing diversity.

We believe that the church of Christ has been multicultural from its beginnings (Acts 2) and will be so in heaven (Revelation 7). Therefore, we understand the ministry of IMD and the “colorful church” as reflecting the eternal DNA of Christ’s body.

Thomas Klammt is leader of International Mission ministries for the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany.
SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN REFUGEE CAMPS  BY SAW WADO

WHO ARE THE KAREN?

Many centuries ago the Karen migrated southward from Tibet and South China, probably around 739 BC, in search of a warmer climate. Ian Morrison acknowledged, “ever since they first arrived in Burma, the Karen appear to have been a subject race, oppressed by their stronger neighbors and frequently used as slaves … they were a subject and despised race.” For centuries the Burman “bullied the Karen and regarded him as slave.” The bullying and oppression still continues.

Karen refugees from Myanmar at a Baptist church gathering in Mae La refugee camp in Thailand

The Karen people, after receiving the gospel through American Baptists in 1813, in turn spread the gospel to other groups in Burma (now Myanmar), such as Chin, Kachin, Nagas, the Wa people and Myo, etc.; and to our own Karen people in Thailand. The Karen were pioneers in “one of the most remarkable Christian movements of modern times,” in Burma.

Persecution began in earnest when they received the gospel and the gospel spread like wildfire. Burma was never the same again.

In the 1970s, the Karen people suffered another severe persecution, called “four cut operation,” which resulted in widespread displacement, internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, relocation to towns under military control and refugee camps.

From 2005 onwards, a resettlement program started with mass migration to the United States and Canada; European countries such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland; as well as New Zealand and Australia in the Pacific region. Japan and Korea also took refugee families as part of the resettlement deal.

The Karen people were hard hit by the so-called “four cut operation” of the Burma regime in the 1970s. The “four cut operation” is the regime’s policy intended to deprive the ethnic resistance movement of food, money, intelligence and recruits. The “four cut operation” caused widespread displacement and a refugee crisis. Thousands of refugees flocked into Thailand. Thousands more became displaced and re-displaced.

Karen churches in eastern Burma were cut off from the mainstream Karen Baptist Convention (KBC), headquartered in Insein, Rangoon. Ministers, pastors and members of churches in the Kawthoolei area were unable to attend meetings and conferences. Relationships were cut off. Karen churches suffered from divide-and-rule tactics.

The need for strengthening and nurturing churches along the Thai-Burma border was both a matter of urgency and priority.

Thus, Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Churches (KKBC) was born.

The KKBC started in 1983 to enhance mission activities along the Thai-Burma border because communication with the mainline Karen Baptist Convention in Burma became impossible due to the intense operation of the Burmese military and regime. Joining the Thailand Karen Baptist Convention (TKBC), formed in

“If asked, ‘Lord, is this how you build your church?’ The answer will invariably be ‘yes!’ It is how God builds his church, among the weak and the oppressed, amidst severe persecution and zero tolerance. Yes, God will continue to build his church among the refugees and the displaced.”

– SAW WADO
1955, was not an option because of their identity as political refugees. The KKBC has a Women’s Department to ensure the spiritual welfare of women. The Youth Department promotes the spiritual welfare of youth and endeavors to spiritually awaken young people in the camps along the border and among the internally displaced people in the eastern jungle of Burma.

The Ordained Ministers Council oversees ministries relating to ordinances of the church such as the Lord’s Supper and baptism, the ordination of pastors and marriage ceremonies. The Christian Education Department oversees Bible studies including Sunday Schools and other activities to promote biblical knowledge and commitment to good moral Christian living.

The Mission Board oversees the work of mission and evangelism. KKBC’s Internal Relief Committee deals with relief work in the KKBC and, especially, among the IDPs in the eastern jungle of Burma.

The KKBC as a convention organizes its associations from north to south along the Thai-Burma border. The seven KKBC associations are: the Tavoy Mergui Area (Tamhin and Ban Donyang Karen Refugee Camps); East Daw Na Area (Umpium and Noh Poe Refugee Camps); the Thoo Mwei Area (Maela Camp Karen Refugee Camp); the Mae Ra Moe Area (Mae Rah Moe Camp Karen Refugee Camp); the Cholodraw Area (Mae La Oo Camp Karen Refugee Camp); the Has Mu Ber Area (Internally Displaced Persons Area); and the Shwe Gyin Area (Internally Displaced Persons Area).

The KKBC serves as an independent body alongside TKBC of Thailand and the KBC of Burma.

Karen Baptist churches in the refugee camps enjoy favorable freedom, though travel outside the camps is restricted.

Politically, the Karen, along with other ethnic groups, have been engaging in a series of ceasefire talks with the Burma government. Karen politics, including the fate of refugees, is at a crossroad as Burma itself is at a crossroad.

If asked, “Lord, is this how you build your church?” The answer will invariably be “yes!” It is how God builds his church, among the weak and the oppressed, amidst severe persecution and zero tolerance. Yes, God will continue to build his church among the refugees and the displaced.

There are approximately 100 churches with more than 10,000 members under the umbrella of the KKBC. Some churches moved over from Burma and retained their names and identity. Some churches were newly established by refugee Baptist Christians.

God is using Karen Baptist refugees and diaspora Karen Baptists in very potent and mysterious ways.

Saw Wado is acting principal of Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible College in the Mae La refugee camp, chair of the Global Karen Baptist Youth Fellowship and secretary of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Churches Youth Department.
REFUGEE REVIVAL

Norway is one of the most open in welcoming refugees from other countries. It is also one of the most active on justice issues in multilateral organizations and forums, such as the United Nations.

Baptists in Norway have been welcoming refugees into the country since at least the 1980s, with the arrival of refugees from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and other African countries. The first immigrant congregation joined the Baptist Union of Norway in 2001.

Among the largest immigrant groups are Chin, Kachin and Karen from Myanmar. In more recent times, there have been refugees from Iran, Iraq and Syria. Baptist work began in earnest among Myanmar refugees in 2003. At least 30 percent of the member churches of the union comprise refugees, the fastest growing segment of the Baptist population.

Jan Saethre, first vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, who is from Norway, said the last 10 years has been nothing short of a revival among Baptists in his country. This is due largely to the increasing presence of refugees in Baptist congregations.

“Some Baptist congregations were dying and this was a revival for them,” said Saethre. “In 10 years the union changed so much. We had 62 or 63 churches in the 1990s. Today we have close to 100. For some churches this is the revival they’ve been praying for so many years. It has given them a new life.”

One example is the Skein Baptist Church. Roughly 150 members or some 25 percent of the population are refugees or the children of refugees. Baptist families in Skein help refugees “to settle and integrate and adjust into Norwegian society.”

He explained that the church “help them to keep their own identity, but they have to live there and they have to understand how things work.”

Saethre said the immigration of refugees into the country helped to open up Norwegian society, which was largely homogenous. “We were not so aware because we did not have the history with foreigners like many other countries had,” he explained. “But over the past several years we have seen the blessing of it and it has been an important part of our work as a church.”

All this is nothing less than God’s doing. “This is God’s call to us that we should take action to live out our faith toward those who are vulnerable, who have had a tough, tough journey coming into our country.”
A MINISTRY OF PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION

**Faith Evangelical Baptist Church (FEBAC) of South Sudan** was founded in 2007 by mostly refugees who sought refuge in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya after fleeing the war in Sudan.

The first meeting to formalize and declare the birth of the new church was held February 15, 2007, in Abwong, Upper Nile State in South Sudan. It was also the convening of the first General Assembly where members of the Central Executive Church Council, among other officials, were elected.

Since then, FEBAC has been experiencing steady growth with some challenges, as it serves in a war torn country. There are 122 confirmed local congregations in various states and regions of South Sudan, with most comprising 200-700 members, depending on the population of the area.

These churches are spread out across the country in Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria, Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Central Equatoria and Unity. FEBAC has also established churches in Kenya with active congregations in Nairobi and the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya.

FEBAC-South Sudan is well served by 26 adequately trained and ordained pastors, reflecting the strong belief of FEBAC in thorough preparation and training of its pastors and leaders for the work of the ministry. Most pastors and leaders received advanced theological and ministerial training in Kenya and in South Sudan. Several are former refugees who were repatriated back to South Sudan and who established Baptist congregations in their areas.

Its vision is “to become a community of believers passionately witnessing for Christ, and holistically transforming the world for God.” Its stated mission is “to proclaim the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ and the beliefs of the evangelical Christian faith, to encourage the worship of God and to inspire in all persons a love for Christ, a passion for righteousness and a consciousness of their duties to God and their fellow human beings through worship, witnessing and ministry to the needs of the people of this church and the community/society.”

FEBAC is a member of the Church in South Sudan and partners with other Christian denominations in fulfilling the Great Commission, in peace-building, trauma healing and reconciliation. We partner with the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Sudan Interior Church and other denominations in South Sudan. One key partnership among the South Sudan churches is the Inter Church Committee (ICC) that aims to address peace and reconciliation, among other issues.

The church body has formed close and cordial working relationships with the communities where it has churches. FEBAC is well aware of the challenges facing the communities and has initiated development projects that have offered solutions to the challenges facing these communities.

Community projects include the drilling of boreholes in various villages; emergency relief; the provision of seeds and irrigation equipment to help beneficiaries to be food sufficient and secure; the promotion of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence among warring communities in South Sudan and among the large population of South Sudanese refugees in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya; as well as capacity building, leadership development and theological training.

FEBAC continues to deepen its involvement in these and other areas, and has developed a Strategic Plan for 2017-2021, focusing on education, health/HIV/AIDS, capacity building and leadership, food security, water, peacebuilding and reconciliation, childcare and protection, humanitarian emergency response and economic empowerment.

An important thrust is to overcome the consequences of war, conflicts, division and displacement on the educational sector. These include an inadequate number of trained teachers, a lack of infrastructure for learning and inadequate access to educational materials for both teachers and learners. “The frequent displacement of communities due to conflict [that] affects education is on-going; … communities flee to localities without schools at all,” the church body noted.

Large gaps exist in the health sector, a chronic need in the face of high incidences of HIV and AIDS and vulnerability to infectious diseases such as malaria. “The number of trained health providers … is dismally low. Moreover, basic supplies for health are an area greatly constrained by infrequency of supplies, limited range of supplies and high logistical costs for supplies.”

Various personnel have been named to tackle these social problems. In addition to a director for evangelism, mission, Christian education and training, FEBAC has appointed personnel with special responsibilities for community development and social services, agriculture and health, as well as peacebuilding and reconciliation.

This article includes information provided by John Aben Deng, moderator general of the Faith Evangelical Baptist Church of South Sudan.
SOUTH SUDAN BECAME INDEPENDENT FROM Sudan on July 9, 2011, after 21 years of civil war which led to more than two million people being killed with many others fleeing to neighboring countries.

Due to the violence that erupted in the capital city of Juba in December 2013, South Sudanese are displaced and uprooted from their various homes, villages and communities.

The situation saw deadly clashes between the forces of the ruling party and quickly spread all over the country. More than 20,000 innocent civilians were killed. Others were detained by security forces and subjected to various forms of torture. Secret prisons were created where innocent citizens were tortured. Systematic killing was carried out based on tribal lines, forcing thousands of citizens to flee to neighboring countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan.

Along with the influx of the South Sudanese fleeing their country were some pastors. In January 2014, The Baptist Convention of South Sudan followed them to these countries and planted churches in Adjumani in Uganda, Kakuma in Kenya and Gambella in Ethiopia. The number of refugees fleeing to the camps increased greatly. Hence, we started raising up more leaders to plant more churches.

We discipled church leaders and sent them out to plant churches in about 60 percent of the camps. This church planting process was done through evangelism, witnessing, one to one and group discipleship and follow up. This gave birth to multiple churches. Refugees also planted churches.

In January 2014, The Baptist Convention of South Sudan followed them to these countries and planted churches in Adjumani in Uganda, Kakuma in Kenya and Gambella in Ethiopia.

Edward Dima, president of the Baptist Convention of South Sudan, addresses a group of Baptists

A Baptist gathering in a refugee camp

South Sudan Baptist pastor, Julius Kajewuya, recovering from a bullet wound

In January 2014, The Baptist Convention of South Sudan followed them to these countries and planted churches in Adjumani in Uganda, Kakuma in Kenya and Gambella in Ethiopia.
Linguistic research found there is no single “Chin” word that is an explicit reference to all the people usually called “Chin.” The term “Zomi” means “people of Zo” and is derived from the generic name “Zo,” the progenitor of the Zomi.

Zomi people have typically Tiberto-Burma features and are generally of short-stature with straight black hair and dark eyes. We want to be called and recognized as “Zomi” instead of Chin by the Baptist World Alliance and eventually the rest of the world. It is our own authentic indigenous identity and, hence, we named our organization Zomi Baptist Churches of America (ZBCA).

Largescale migration of Zomi to the United States is less than 10 years. Most came as refugees and asylees. Traditionally, Zomi were animists. Today, 95 percent of the Zomi people are Christians with most being Protestant, especially Baptist, as a result of American Baptist missionary work in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This has led to continued attempts at forced assimilation.

Due to political and religious persecution in Myanmar, they fled to neighboring countries by crossing over the borders of Thailand, Malaysia and India. For most leaving Myanmar, the trip is illegal, dangerous and expensive. There are brokers who charge up to US$1,000 per person to transport refugees across the border. If they are caught they face imprisonment that includes harsh treatment, such as beatings.

The majority of refugees from Myanmar fled to Malaysia, though Malaysia is not a signatory to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As such, they are generally considered economic migrants by the Malaysian government. There is no financial support for their living from either the UNHCR or nongovernmental organizations. They commonly live in overcrowded communal flats in the city or in jungle shelters constructed of bamboo and thatch with no electricity.

Due to their illegal status, there are no resources for justice if they face discrimination or harassment. All refugees are deemed illegal immigrants in Malaysia; many may feel threatened and have a negative perception of uniformed security personal and authorities. Bribery is illegal, dangerous and expensive. There are verged government officials and police has become accepted as a means of protection.

Zomi have been migrating to the US in recent years with the help of the UNHCR and US Immigration. The refugee application process can take two years to more than 10 years. Almost all new Zomi arrivals do not speak English including some pastors and church elders. This is the main reason why Zomi Baptist Churches of America was born – to have worship services in our own mother tongue.

At the beginning, we started with a group of people gathered in a home. We then looked for a place to worship. Through the assistance of other believers in the neighborhood we were allowed to use their church building, paying a small fee or for free of charge. We are thankful for American Christians who warmly welcomed us and supported us in our every need. Some pastors have a vision to organize these newly arrived believers, guiding and helping them in their daily physical and spiritual needs.

Zomi Baptist Churches of America was founded on October 21, 2012, in Nashville, Tennessee, with four churches from Oklahoma, Tennessee, Florida and Colorado. Our four main purposes are:

1. To worship God, who gave us salvation and brought us to this land of opportunity and freedom, and not to forget his blessings
2. As the Lord instructed the Israelites in Deut. 8:7-14, we teach and admonish our youngsters to worship God in our own Zomi language so that we might preserve and maintain our culture and customs for our next generation while learning the English language and other cultures;
3. Assist, serve and promote each other in love within our society
4. Provide a general organization of Zomi Baptists in the United States for the promotion of Christian mission at home and abroad

We started with four churches and have expanded to 31 churches in 17 states with 35 church pastors. ZBCA is helping churches to find a place to worship and providing Zomi pastors to those churches that do not have pastors by inviting them from Myanmar and India. In order to have our own sanctuary, ZBCA assists those who purchase church buildings with a sum of up to US$50,000 per church.

ZBCA holds annual conferences, annual Ministers Council meetings and seminars to promote fellowship, mission and networking. We, especially pastors, are serving as a liaison for Zomi refugees by volunteering every single day to help our church members with job applications, interpretation during job interviews, medical appointments, official appointments and charity.

If one active member dies, ZBCA assists with US$15,000 burial expenses, demonstrating we are indeed one family in Christ. In 2015, we helped flood victims in Myanmar by providing food, shelter and rebuilding church buildings and houses.

To promote Christian education and mission work overseas, ZBCA has a project plan for a Zomi Theological Seminary in Myanmar. We purchased land and plan on constructing school buildings within the next two years.

Tun Cin Kap is vice president and former secretary general of the Zomi Baptist Churches of America.
Gathering that will be from July 7-13. Bahamian Baptists issued an invitation to the BWA to host the 2019 events in their island nation.

The Executive Committee, which met at the BWA international offices in Falls Church, Virginia, in the United States, in early March, endorsed the recommendation that the Turkish Baptist Alliance and the Baptist Evangelical Church of Chad be accepted as BWA members. If the applications are approved by the BWA General Council at its meetings in Bangkok, Thailand, in July, it will bring two new nations into the BWA, numbering 124 countries and territories and 237 conventions and unions within the BWA family.

It was announced to the Executive Committee that a special forum on baptism will take place during the Annual Gathering in Bangkok with celebrated British theologian, Anthony Cross, as main presenter. Cross is a member of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford and author of the acclaimed book, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament*.

A request from the Baptist Union of Netherlands (BUN) that the BWA supports the creation of a McClendon Chair at the Free University in Amsterdam received the endorsement of the Executive Committee. The BUN has held a chair on Baptist History, Identity and Theology at the university since April 2009. James McClendon, Jr., who died in 2000, was a Baptist theologian and ethicist from the United States who taught theology at several institutions. He helped found the narrative theology movement in the late 1960s.

The final approval for the post of associate general secretary and the filling of that position will await the completion of the search process and appointment of a new general secretary.

The theme for the July 22-26, 2020, congress of Baptists in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has been approved. Dubbed Celebration 2020, the international event will, for the first time, merge the Baptist World Congress and the Baptist Youth World Conference, both previously held as separate events. The theme will be “Together.”

Other important dates on the BWA calendar include the Annual Gathering in Zurich, Switzerland, from July 1-7, 2018; and the 9th Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE) from July 5-7, 2019. BICTE precedes the Annual Gathering that will be from July 7-13.
REFUGEE DOCTOR TO RECEIVE HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

Cynthia Maung, a medical doctor who has devoted nearly 30 years to providing healthcare to refugees from Myanmar living on the Thai-Myanmar border, will be the 2017 recipient of the Baptist World Alliance Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award.

The award is given for significant and effective activities to secure, protect, restore or preserve human rights as stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other declarations on human rights.

The award presentation will be made by the General Council, which convenes during the BWA Annual Gathering in Bangkok, Thailand, from July 2-7.

Maung was among the displaced Karen who fled to and settled in Mae Sot on the border between Thailand and Myanmar.

Since 1949, the Karen people, an ethnic minority group in Myanmar, have been fighting for an independent Karen State. Hundreds of thousands of Karen and others from various ethnic groups have been killed in the conflict and many Karen have fled across the border into Thailand.

In February 1989, five months after escaping Myanmar, Maung established the Mae Tao Medical Clinic with a staff of six in a dilapidated building in Mae Sot. In the early days, she sterilized her medical instruments in a rice cooker. At its original location, the clinic was frequently affected by natural disasters such as floods. It has since relocated to a safer building.

The clinic was opened in response to the prevalence of infectious and other diseases such as malaria and pneumonia in Mae Sot and other refugee camps. It received support from Baptists in Thailand and elsewhere, the Karen and residents of Mae Sot.

Using donated medical supplies, the malaria epidemic was brought under control. Trauma victims with gunshot wounds and injuries from landmines received treatment, as well as those who needed maternity care and HIV counseling.

By 2003, the clinic was treating more than 42,000 patients per year and had a staff that included six doctors, 86 health workers, 150 other medical and administrative staff members and 20-40 international volunteers per year.

The clinic, which now has a staff of more than 600, delivers up to 15 babies per day and fits 250 new and replacement prosthetic limbs each year. It treats between 300 and 400 patients daily, or up to 150,000 annually, including refugees, migrant workers and locals.

In addition to medical treatments, the Mae Tao Medical Clinic trains medical interns, nurses and hygienists. Its social programs include feeding more than 500 people twice each day.

Maung’s clinical interests in obstetrics and women’s reproductive health have broadened to include issues of domestic violence and human rights.

More than 50 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, educational institutions and individual donors have supported the clinic and its programs.

Maung, the fourth of eight children, was born into a Baptist Karen family near the city of Moulmein, Myanmar, in 1959. “Dr. Cynthia Maung is a woman of faith who has committed her life selflessly for the welfare of the poor and oppressed,” the BWA Executive Committee was told. “She is a member of the Kawthloolei Karen Baptist Churches and involved with the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation women’s work.”

She entered the Institute of Medicine II in Yangon (formerly Rangoon), the medical school in which Karen, Mons, Arakanese and other minority students in Myanmar are concentrated.

After graduating medical school in 1985, she worked in a private maternity clinic in Bassein, operated by her great-aunt, a nurse, in the beginning of her specialization in obstetrics and gynecology. She left that facility and worked at a clinic in the village of Eaim Du to be near her ill mother. Political crisis and unrest in the country in 1988 led to her and others fleeing.

Maung had previously received the Jonathan Mann Award, sponsored by Swiss and US health organizations, in 1999; Southeast Asia’s Ramon Magsaysay Award for community leadership in 2002; the Sydney Peace Prize in 2013; and the South Korean POSCO TJ Park Prize in 2015. She was named one of Time magazine’s Asian Heroes in 2003.

“Dr. Cynthia Maung is a woman of faith who has committed her life selflessly for the welfare of the poor and oppressed,” the BWA Executive Committee was told. “She is a member of the Kawthloolei Karen Baptist Churches and involved with the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation women’s work.”
WORLD BAPTISTS AND METHODISTS DIALOGUE IN JAMAICA

The Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council (WMC) were engaged in the fourth session of the international theological dialogue between the two Christian World Communions in Runaway Bay on Jamaica’s north coast, from February 1-8.

The 2017 theme was, “The Call to Discipleship: Faith Working through Love.” Special attention was given to global Baptist and Methodist practices and beliefs.

Participants discussed a range of papers on the works of piety and mercy; worship and preaching, including hymnody; and the outworking of faith in practice among Baptists and Methodists in Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean.

Worship conducted at the meetings included reflections on stories related to the theme and topics.

As well as considering the 10 papers submitted for discussion, work on compiling the final report began and tasks were set to prepare for the concluding meeting scheduled for Sarum College, Salisbury, in the United Kingdom, March 14-21, 2018.

The dialogue members participated in Sunday worship at Hoolebury Methodist Church in the St. Ann’s Bay Circuit of the Jamaica District. They were joined for the service by Everard Galbraith, bishop of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas. Oral Thomas of the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) in Kingston preached the sermon on Matthew 5:20, drawing on the theme of holy hands and helping hands in the joining together of worship and service.

Earlier in the week the group traveled to Kingston to visit the denominational offices of the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU) and the Jamaica Methodist District and shared lunch at Saxthorpe Methodist Church. They then visited the UTCWI on the campus of the University of the West Indies at Mona before calling at the Bob Marley Museum and having dinner hosted by the general secretary of the JBU, Karl Johnson.

The BWA delegation comprised dialogue Co-chair Curtis Freeman, research professor of theology and director of the Baptist House of Studies at Duke University Divinity School in the United States; Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, professor of Church History and African Christianity at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan in Nigeria; Valérie Duval-Poujol, professor of biblical exegesis at the Catholic Institute in Paris, France, and director for its Institute for Bible and Orientalism; Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in the US; Stephen Holmes, senior lecturer in theology at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland; and R. L. Hnuni, principal of Calcutta Bible Seminary in Kolkata, India.

Methodist representatives were dialogue Co-chair Tim Macquiban, minister of Wesley Church and superintendent minister in the United Kingdom; Paul W. Chilcote, academic dean and professor of historical theology and Wesleyan Studies at Ashland Theological Seminary in the US; Christine Gooden-Benguche, secretary, Jamaica District Conference, Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas; Lauren Claire Matthew, minister in the Umngeni Circuit, Natal Coastal District in South Africa, district supervisor of studies of the General Committee of Education for Mission and president of the Youth and Young Adult Committee of the WMC; Ulrike Schuler, professor for Church History, Methodism and Ecumenism at Reutlingen School of Theology in Germany; and Malcolm Tan, pastor, Barker Road Methodist Church in Singapore.

BWA coordinator for the Division on Mission, Evangelism and Justice, Trisha Miller Manarin, served as BWA staff liaison at the meeting.

Previous sessions of the BWA-WMC dialogue were held in the United States in 2014, Singapore in 2015 and Germany in 2016. The final session will take place in February 2018.
AN URGENT NEED: A COMMON THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY FOR BAPTISTS
BY NEVILLE CALLAM

IN 1911, EMINENT FORMER BWA PRESIDENT John Clifford made the following claim: Principles on which we base ourselves we derive straight from Jesus, are accepted on His authority and involve in all who accept them total subjection of soul to his gracious benignant rule.

Perhaps some Baptist leaders today would confess that we do not actually achieve this desired goal. Yet, the question may be asked, “On what fundamental theological premise does the BWA predicate its existence? Put differently, how does one characterize the nature of the BWA?”

This fundamentally important question did not assume the commanding heights of the attention of the BWA 21st Century Committee, which concerned itself primarily with the question of the purpose of the BWA. Today, BWA needs to engage intentionally in a discussion on its nature as an ecclesial body. Hesitancy to address this fundamental question, which has been raised from time to time over the years, is understandable. It would require enormous effort to secure consensus or even convergence among BWA member organizations around an understanding of the nature of the organization.

Several historical and theological works published over the last decade have emphasized the absence of a single continuous Baptist tradition that can be retrieved, summarized and put forward as an accurate expression of the theological understanding that informs the nature of translocal Baptist bodies. This is especially the case at the international level. This bewildering fact is not lost on some Baptists and on members of other Christian World Communions who seek earnestly to understand who Baptists are and what they believe.

BAPTIST THEOLOGIANS’ REFLECTIONS ON BAPTIST IDENTITY
James Leo Garrett (2009), who identifies “Baptist distinctive differences from other Christian denominations” as “essentially ecclesiological,” goes so far as to raise a question that needs to be asked today, “whether Baptists hold to and clearly affirm and practice their distinctives.”

According to David Bebbington (2010), “the investigation of Baptist identity entails exploration of diversity.” A task Bebbington identifies as, what he terms, “seven fairly distinct strands of Baptist life.” He calls these strands “variations” or “tendencies” and he identifies them in terms of “a liberal section,” “classic evangelicals,” “premillenialists,” “charismatic renewal,” “Calvinism,” “Anabaptists” and “High Church views.” Bebbington suggests that, as Baptist witness has spread internationally, Baptist self-understandings have become “drastically modified,” resulting in what makes contemporary Baptist identity so diverse as to “defy analysis.”

In a laudable publication that seeks to dislodge the perception of Baptist history and identity from its captivity to an Anglo (English) and Anglo-American cultural matrix, American church historian Robert E. Johnson (2010) writes about the worldwide Baptist movement’s “theological polycentrism” that is articulated “in proliferating traditioning sources.” He describes the Baptist movement as “a loosely connected fellowship of Baptists whose histories, interpretations, cultural backgrounds and contexts differ in significant ways. This means that even commonly stated beliefs and practices are not always understood the same way in differing contexts.” Johnson states boldly, “A major challenge for Baptists, given their movement’s particular kind of ecclesiology, is to discover what – if anything – is cohesive in this diversity.”

Stephen Holmes (2012) notes that Baptists lack an “(even relatively) united body of reflection that is generally agreed to make up the discourse of ‘Baptist theology.’” He adds that the Baptist tradition does not have “a long and settled history of reflection on its own doctrinal identity.”

Meanwhile, to the extent that Baptists may be said to have a tradition, Curtis Freeman (2014) asks why “Baptists have not taken their own tradition seriously.” Freeman sees an urgent need for Baptists to “draw from a historical consciousness within their own heritage” and to locate their convictions and practices “within a larger ecclesial narrative.”
In a recent history of Baptists in America, Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins (2015) assert that “there is no Baptist Church, only Baptist churches. Similarly there is no Baptist theology, only Baptist theologies. . . Baptists rarely agree among themselves about what makes them distinct.” Kidd and Hankins include among the three features that may be said to mark Baptists throughout history “the willingness to call oneself a Baptist.”

Steven Harmon (2016) celebrates, as a Baptist contribution to the church universal, our “pilgrim aversion to overly realized eschatologies of the church and [our] radical commitment to discerning the rule of Christ by means of the Scriptures.” Harmon rejoices in this Baptist contribution to the world church. He also calls on Baptists to “receive from other churches neglected aspects of the radical catholicity from which the Scriptures are inseparable.”

RECONSIDERING BWA SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Especially in the period associated with the General Council meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1993, church historians and theologians active in BWA life considered the significant issue of BWA’s self-understanding. BWA would benefit from a fresh attempt at answering this question at a time when so many churches have espoused a koinonia, or communion, ecclesiology. Both the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation have shown that it is possible for Protestant groups to adopt a communion ecclesiology without renouncing their character as reformation churches. What the late great South African theologian, Manas Burbelesi, said at the Tenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation remains true:

The test of the authenticity of a communion is when it is able to manifest itself under circumstances of diversity, including those leading to real tensions. We often experience the reality of this during meetings.

Why has the exploration of the nature of the BWA not been at the forefront of BWA life? There is an obvious answer. The late great South African theologian, Manas Burbelesi, said to mark Baptists throughout history “the willingness to call oneself a Baptist.”

The BWA was to be understood as “an instrument that understands its role and focuses intentionally on entrenching the BWA constitution that was made in the year when the celebrated prophet of Baptist individualism, Edgar Young (E.Y.) Mullins, was elected BWA president. This architect of “soul competency” did include his “axioms” in the memorable address he delivered at the 1905 Baptist World Congress. He worked out some implications of his thesis in the address he gave at the Third BWA Congress in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1923.

“A major challenge for Baptists, given their movement’s particular kind of ecclesiology, is to discover what — if anything — is cohesive in this diversity.”

— Neville Callam

Mullins’ eloquent Stockholm presentation helped influence the positive reception of a fundamental change in BWA’s constitution.

The BWA was to be understood as “an expression of the essential oneness . . . [not of Baptist Churches, but] of Baptists.” It would be interesting to research whether Baptists today would consider reverting to the earlier formulation of BWA’s purpose. Or would it be true to say that, in most Baptist contexts, the triumph of Baptist individualism trumps the attractiveness of Baptist communion? Unless BWA stakeholders can balance the individual and the communal adequately, BWA will continue to face the challenge of competing claims between the self interest of its constituent members and the welfare of the fellowship of the worldwide Baptist community, which finds expression in the BWA.

I am convinced that the church is to be a sign of the communion that God models in God’s own trinitarian life. Each Christian World Communion shares within itself an imperfect communion. This is why internal disagreement sometimes leads to disintegration. Yet, even when fragmentation happens, communion is not destroyed; instead, it becomes impaired. And communion will be so regarded only when the BWA reimages itself as a communion, clearly identifies the bonds that hold it together, and focuses intentionally on entrenching appropriate instruments that understand their role within BWA’s communal life.

Excerpts of a report to the BWA Executive Committee, March 2017
A BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE STATEMENT ON REFUGEES

The Baptist World Alliance reaffirms its biblical stance concerning refugees, vulnerable people who are oftentimes victimized for their faith.

In a resolution approved by its General Council in Vancouver, Canada, in July 2016, the BWA calls upon its “member bodies, affiliated churches and individual believers to actively embrace opportunities for Christian ministry and witness that exemplify the biblical teaching to love the stranger (Lev. 19:18b) and Jesus’ teaching to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40), being salt and light in ways that bring the values of our Lord into our culture.”

The resolution further encourages Christian believers “to personally engage with all refugees and displaced persons, generously showing God’s love and care as we demonstrate the sufficiency of God made known through Jesus Christ.”

In light of this resolution as well as previous resolutions in 2011 and 2013, the BWA decries recent actions by the United States Government to issue a blanket travel ban on seven countries that specifically targets refugees and that seems to especially affect Muslims.

These actions are already having a negative impact on the lives of families. It has adversely affected service providers who work directly with refugees and has created unexpected difficulties for Baptist institutions in the United States, such as universities and seminaries, with students enrolled from the seven named countries.

While the BWA recognizes that a government has a right to create and maintain conditions that provide for the safety of its citizens, there is a temptation to give in to fear and to hastily pursue misguided policies that will have deleterious long-term effects and that undermine freedom of religion.

We accept this is not a situation that has emerged quickly and is in part a response to longstanding problems in these seven countries. We decry unjust actions that are too often left unaddressed and conditions that are allowed to deteriorate.

We note that in Iraq, Christians, Yazidis and others face genocide at the hands of the Islamic State. Over the last decade, the Christian population in Iraq has shrunk from 1.5 million to less than 200,000.

In Yemen, a Global Alert from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network indicates that Yemen is at risk of the highest level of food insecurity.

Syria is one of the most complex conflicts and humanitarian situations that has devastated the country, which faces trauma and rebuilding.

Baptists, fellow Christians and all people of goodwill should work to reverse conditions that lead to displacement in these and other countries and for peace, harmony and justice to prevail.

The BWA commends Baptists in countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Germany, Sweden, Croatia, Serbia and elsewhere, who have embodied the biblical mandate to stand with the vulnerable and to extend Christian hospitality. We support Baptists in the United States who offer welcome and provide assistance.

BWA AT WORLD CONVENTION IN INDIA

B. Moses Sudheer of India represented Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam at the 19th Global Gathering of the World Convention of Churches of Christ in Damoh, Jabalpur, in India, which took place January 12-15.

The World Convention seeks to bring together denominations in the Christian Churches, Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ traditions, and invites Christian World Communions, such as the BWA, to participate in its Global Gathering.

Sudheer brought greetings and was a resource person in the workshop on “Unity and Mission in Asia.” In his presentation, he characterized BWA’s involvement in the global Christian community.
RURAL WATER AND SANITATION PROJECT IN ZAMBIA

BAPTIST WORLD AID, THE RELIEF AND development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, gave support to a rural water and sanitation project in four provinces in Zambia. Targeted areas were Mbala, Mansa, Kayosha and Kasempa districts.

The BWAid sponsorship of US$34,000, which runs from September 2014 to December 2017, met an urgent need. This success has had a broadening impact on the social life of the four districts.

It has resulted in improved household access to safe drinking water, increased school attendance by children, increased access to affordable and adequate sanitation, increased use of toilets and sanitary facilities, a reduction in diarrheal diseases and a cleaner environment due to reduced disposal of human waste in open spaces.

“School attendance, especially for girls, has improved,” the Baptist Convention of Zambia (BCZ) told the Baptist World Alliance. “Before water supply boreholes were constructed in the four communities, absenteeism was rife among girls in both primary and secondary schools because of water problems. Most of the girls used to spend a lot of time looking for water at the expense of education.”

BCZ said “there is increased leisure time for women who hardly had time for relaxation. The boreholes have eased the burden of fetching water which is one of the most arduous tasks for women and girls in rural areas.”

Four training workshops on hygiene were conducted, leading to a 60 percent reduction in the prevalence of waterborne diseases, especially cholera, dysentery and diarrhea. There was a 60 percent reduction in health costs as well as time for collecting water, translating into substantial saving for rural households.

BCZ told the BWA that the original plans to dig 18 borehole wells and the construction of 150 latrines have had to be revised due to a spike in costs. “From the time the project started to date, prices of goods and services have shot up by over 100 percent,” BCZ explained. The convention said the cost of one borehole, which was ZMK14,000 (US$2,546) in October 2014, rose to ZMK28,000 (US$5,092) in 2015 and ZMK48,000 (US$9,139.38) in 2016. “As a result, we will construct fewer water supply boreholes and pit latrines than we planned.” Only nine boreholes will be commissioned and 70 pit latrines built.

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

My name is Memory Mwape. I am 14 years old and this is my elder brother, Musonda Mwape. He is 16 years old. We come from Mwenda Village in Mbala district where you are constructing a bore hole. I’m in grade six at Kaizya Primary School but my brother dropped out of school last year because of water problems. Our father died and Musonda is the man of the house doing all sorts of work including hunting for clean water. My brother hardly had time for studies, so when exams came he failed.

I am very happy because BWAid has given us water. It’s like a lie that from tomorrow onwards we will no longer be traveling long distances to fetch clean water for home use. Before you gave us the borehole, life in our village was hard especially us girls. A girl from my village was raped when she went to draw water from Runzuwa River. She now has a baby from that ordeal.

I hope BWAid will consider building a school in our village so that all the children who dropped out of school can have a chance of receiving education. Another thing, please tell BWAid to build us a health center in our community. Our nearest clinic is 15 kilometers away.

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October 2016 was very active for the Caribbean. Hurricanes Matthew and Nicole left a trail of damage in the territories traversed. Hurricane Matthew, for example, claimed one life in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, four in the Dominican Republic and more than 1,000 in Haiti. The nature of the devastation varies from territory to territory. All the countries impacted by Matthew, for example, Cuba, Haiti and the Bahamas among others, and Bermuda by Nicole, experienced infrastructural damage, loss and damage to roofs, destruction of agricultural products and animals, among other damage.

I made a visit to Haiti at the instance of the Baptist World Alliance to conduct an assessment of the damage done and to recommend the channel through which relief was to be sent. Based on the assessment done, it was discovered that 200 of the 300 Baptist churches affiliated with the Missionary Evangelical Baptist Church of South Haiti (MEBSH) were damaged. In addition, 150 schools were damaged by the hurricane. Various equipment and school and church furniture were damaged in addition to houses and public facilities.

In view of the fact that the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew was confined mainly to the Southwestern part of Haiti and the MEBSH has relief machinery in place, it was recommended that relief efforts be channelled through them. The Caribbean Baptist Fellowship is grateful to Baptist World Aid for the assistance provided for Haiti so far. Everton Jackson is BWA regional secretary for the Caribbean and executive secretary/treasurer for the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship. These are excerpts from a report to the BWA Executive Committee in March 2017.
#YOUTHPRAYER17

CALLING ALL YOUNG PEOPLE from all around the world! Rally up the youth in your churches and join your brothers and sisters as we reflect upon the importance of prayer and to intercede on behalf of others.

On June 11, 2017, young people will celebrate the unity we share as believers in Jesus Christ and seek a deeper relationship with Christ on our Youth World Day of Prayer.

This year’s theme is “Prophetic Action” and is based on the Singapore Declaration which calls Baptist young people to commit to live as “G.O.S.P.E.L.” people.

There will also be an opportunity to contribute to our Annual Prayer Offering which is used to assist with mission projects involving young people around the world as well as leadership development training.

Check out our BWA Youth Department Website at http://www.bwanet.org/programs/youth/baptist-youth-world-day-of-prayer to download the materials (available May 1, 2017).

We also have our Prayer Wall on the BWA Youth Department page on Facebook. There we encourage people to post prayer requests, memories and pictures from Youth World Day of Prayer gatherings, pray for one another throughout the year and to be connected and know what the global Baptist family is doing. You are always welcome to share your prayers and prayer requests all year round.

Remember to use your #hashtags on our social media sites and let the world know that the BWA Youth are doing great things for Jesus!

INTERIM WOMEN’S DIRECTOR APPOINTED

MOREEN SHARP, a Canadian and president of the North American Baptist Women’s Union (NABWU) and a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department (BWAWD), has been appointed interim executive director of the BWA Women’s Department.

Sharp currently volunteers part-time as BWAWD acting executive director and will become full time interim executive director after her five-year term is completed with NABWU in October. Her new appointment lasts until July 2020.

She succeeds Patsy Davis, who retired December 31, 2015, after working as BWAWD executive director for 17 years.

Sharp has had longstanding involvement in women’s ministry. From 2008-2010, she was president of Women in Focus, the Women’s Department for Canadian Baptists of Western Canada. During that time she was also on the boards of Canadian Baptist Ministries, Canadian Baptist Women and NABWU.

Currently, she is a member of the BWA General Council and the Commission on Human Rights Advocacy, as well as the General Council of the North American Baptist Fellowship.

She and her husband, Paul, have been ministry partners for more than 30 years in several countries. Moreen has led teaching, music and drama ministries in Japan, India and Canada. The couple has engaged in transitional pastoral ministry, serving various congregations in Canada on a short term basis.

She is a graduate of Regent College, an international graduate school of theology in the city of Vancouver in Canada.
BAPTISTS OF SIERRA LEONE

**BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE GENERAL SECRETARY NEVILLE CALLAM** was a special guest and speaker at the 43rd assembly of the Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone (BCSL) in Lunsar in the Port Loco District, January 31 to February 5.

It was the first Baptist assembly since the outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus that devastated the West African country, beginning in 2014 into 2016. Almost 4,000 Sierra Leoneans died, including many Baptists, with more than 14,000 confirmed cases nationwide.

Callam said he went to help Sierra Leonian Baptists make sense of what they had passed through in the Ebola epidemic. Many had lost loved ones and close relatives. Churches lost brothers and sisters in the faith, as well as pastors and leaders.

An unexpected outcome of the Ebola crisis was that Baptists secured formal tenure to the land which they had occupied for decades, constructing offices, a conference center and other buildings there. The convention did not have secure tenure as they had thought and a prospective buyer had expressed interest in purchasing the property. With the outbreak of Ebola, that purchaser pulled back from purchasing the property, opening the way for BCSL to formalize its ownership.

Callam noted that the convention has had good relationships with other Christian traditions, such as Presbyterians and Methodists. In fact, Joseph Sedu Mans, regarded as the father of the BCSL, was a Wesleyan Church pastor and was vice president of the Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone from 1960-1965. In 1972, Mans was tapped to lead Baptist work in Sierra Leone and became the first president of the newly formed Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone in 1974.

Even though Sierra Leone is mostly Muslim, there is cordiality between the Christian community, including Baptists, and Muslims. One reason for this cordiality is the history of strong social ministry exhibited by Christians, such as hospitals and schools. For instance, Baptists operate an eye hospital, one of the best medical facilities in the nation. The oldest Baptist church has operated for more than 140 years. Baptist missionaries, including many Baptists from the United States, have worked to convert Muslims. Just seeing how Christians live and love is enough. Baptists are a part of the broad Christian love.

**AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN CONNECTION**

Sierra Leone holds significance not only for Africans, but also for African Americans, the Caribbean and others. It holds a special place for Baptists as the place on the African continent where Baptist witness began.

Led by David George, an ordained Baptist preacher originally from Charleston in South Carolina in the United States, a group of Black Loyalists sailed for Sierra Leone on January 15, 1792, arriving there after a seven-week sea voyage from Nova Scotia. These freed African Americans had fought on the side of the British in the American Revolution and had been granted passage and land in British-controlled Nova Scotia after the British lost the war. Finding conditions in Nova Scotia harsh and the British reneging on promises they made, hundreds of freed Blacks set sail for what is now Sierra Leone.

Shortly after arriving, George started the first Baptist church on the African continent on Rawdon Street in Granville Town. The town was later renamed Freetown to mark the status of the settlers who arrived there, and was made the capital of Sierra Leone.

A group of Jamaicans also ended up in Sierra Leone by way of Nova Scotia. Approximately 600 Jamaican Maroons were exiled from the island by the British to Nova Scotia in 1796. Like the African Americans who found Nova Scotia inhospitable, many of the Jamaicans traveled to and settled in Sierra Leone in 1800.

The African American and Jamaican groups, along with others who settled in Sierra Leone from elsewhere, made up what came to be known as the Creole population, distinguished from the indigenous populations in the region. The Creoles, for long periods in the country’s history, dominated business and politics.

The BCSL now comprises more than 16,000 members in 48 Baptist churches and 85 “fellowships.” The 2017 meetings were held at the Mans Conference Center in Lunsar, some 71 miles from Freetown.

Callam, speaking to the assembly against the backdrop of the Ebola outbreak, expressed the sympathy and support of the global Baptist family. “You have experienced real hardship in Sierra Leone. You have literally walked through the valley of the shadow of death. And many of us around the world have sought to travel this journey with you – with deep love, fervent prayer, with sacrificial support and firm faith rooted and grounded in God.”
SIERRA LEONE AFTER EBOLA

BY NEVILLE CALLAM

Sierra Leone is a country where, in 1787, Black Loyalists who previously settled in Nova Scotia in what is now Canada at the end of the American Revolution, found a home.

It is a place that provided refuge for thousands of people liberated from the shackles of slavery when the British abolished the slave trade in 1807, where people fleeing a prolonged civil war in Liberia found refuge and relief and where insurgents instigated a vicious civil war from 1991-2002 that devastated the country leaving thousands dead and two million people – a third of the population – displaced.

It is also where, in May 2014, a mysterious hemorrhagic fever struck like lightning. Ebola Virus Disease was its name. It ravaged the country, leaving more than 4,000 dead. The tragic loss of life was accompanied by catastrophic damage to the fabric of the country’s economy.

The second to last death resulting from Ebola was that of a female student in the community of Lunsar in the Port Loco District of the country. This is where, in January 2017, the people in the Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone resumed their annual assembly and where I joined them for this important meeting.

On March 17, 2016, the World Health Organization finally declared Sierra Leone Ebola-free.

Many Baptist Christians were among the people killed by Ebola, including an outstanding medical specialist who had returned to his native land from Cameroon where he served at a major Baptist Hospital to join in the fight against Ebola.

The dead included nurses and health workers who surrendered their lives on the altar of service to the people who were infected; Muslims and Christians and followers of traditional African religions all gave their lives in this service. The dead included many ordinary people of the country who simply were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They all perished in the Ebola epidemic.

Baptist World Alliance was among the many organizations and institutions that provided aid to the people during the period when Ebola struck. Now that Ebola is declared at an end, the people needed to know that BWA still stands with them as partners and fellow travelers on the challenging journey of life.

That is why I went to Sierra Leone.

“What would I experience in Lunsar?” was a question that occupied my mind before I left for Sierra Leone.

I found a group of Christ-followers from around the country attending an assembly of the Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone who were not preoccupied with the burden they had to bear, the loss they sustained. I observed a faithful band of disciples who were not distracted by the pain that still threatens to cripple their perspective. I met people who were incredibly upbeat and thankful; they wrapped themselves in a garment of praise and looked to God in celebration.

And what were they celebrating? Not so much the fact that they were still alive after all the destruction they had seen in their communities. Not so much that their religious community was still intact after the death of so many. No! This is not what they celebrated.

They celebrated the miracle of God’s cosmic rescue of humanity from incarceration in the realm of thick darkness delivering them into the safe space of the kingdom of God. And in their celebration, they encouraged each other to live in the light of the Gospel that they believe is stronger than any adversity that can mark human history, stronger than any terror that strikes at the most inopportune moments of life, stronger than any danger that lurks in the pathway of life.

I saw them, heard them offering praise to God. I saw them, heard them pledging to walk in God’s ways and I was simply amazed.

Let’s allow the attitude of the Sierra Leoneans to influence ours. Let us cultivate the capacity to remember God, to remember God’s words, to remember God’s actions, the great things God has done for humankind and all creation.

When we cultivate the memory of what God has done in the past, we can develop the capacity to imagine a future in which the faithful God acts in a manner that is identical to God’s ways in the past.

When we learn to remember God’s goodness, we will find it easier to entrust our future to God’s love and care. We do not look to the future with trepidation and fear. We do not approach the future with timidity, fear and unease. We exchange apprehensiveness for confidence, doubt for faith and despair for hope.
A COMMON MISSION AMONG BAPTISTS

BY PAUL MSIZA

God has given the church a ministry to be pastors, priests and prophets. The ministry of defending human rights, advocating for peace and justice, is important in our time. BWA should continue to empower leaders from all our regions to become advocates for peace, justice and human rights.

The proposal by the general secretary to merge the two divisions of Mission, Evangelism and Theological Reflection and Freedom and Justice, is going to strengthen our theological approach to social justice, mission and evangelization. This approach will empower our members to resist the temptation to embrace a gospel that presents materialism as godliness.

This kind of teaching is presenting a negative witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. Such theologies represent a church that is out to exploit the poor and the powerless. The new Division on Mission, Evangelism and Justice (MEJ) has a great task ahead to continue mobilizing the BWA family to minister relevantly to people that are facing many challenges.

I am certain that our member conventions and unions are working hard to serve God’s people. This can be confirmed by the themes that conventions and unions select. In Chile this year their assembly convened around the theme, “Baptist Identity,” focusing on the fundamental beliefs of Baptists.

In Jamaica the theme was “Being God’s People in God’s World: Living the Sacrificial Life.” In Great Britain the theme says, “Let us be beacons of hope.” The theme of the Nigeria Baptist Convention says, “Moving forward overcoming the challenges of life through Christ.”

Last year the Baptist union in Germany wrestled with the theme, “Colourful Church,” with the aim of calling member churches to open their doors to the many displaced people who go to Germany to seek a better life. EBM International focused on “God’s transforming love.” The Lott Carey Global Christian Mission Community’s theme is “Together, we are touching lives with transforming love.”

This is just a sample to demonstrate that BWA member organizations are working hard to minister to the needs of the people.

These themes show that our member conventions and unions are seriously seeking God’s mind in order to bring a relevant ministry to their communities. I wanted to mention just a few of these themes so that we may celebrate together God’s work within the membership of the BWA. I also hope that this will continue to encourage a discourse among us as members of the BWA household, with the intention to inspire one another as we serve our God.

The BWA is a community where we learn from one another and inspire one another. As I travel and meet members of the BWA family I am encouraged about how the work of the BWA is valued. Many Baptists have been empowered and inspired by their participation in the BWA.

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

MINISTRY IN A TURKISH CITY

BY TONY PECK

Samsun is a city of 600,000 people on the Black Sea coast of Turkey. The Baptist church is the only church of any kind within a three-hour drive of the city. Visiting the church last September was an inspiring and humbling experience for Helle Liht, Rupen Das and I. Here is an isolated community of God’s people, led by a courageous pastor, Orhan, who has endured threats against his life and even being kidnapped.

It might be tempting for the church to meet quietly behind closed doors, but they are determined to explore the full meaning of what it means to be “witnesses” to Christ in this situation. Their present rented church building has a lighted cross on its top.

Whilst we were there, Pastor Orhan invited Helle and me to go into the sea with him to baptize three Iranian refugees, publicly declaring their new-found faith in Christ. Then we were taken to see a piece of ground, in the shadow of a large mosque, where the church wants to build its own larger building to handle the increasing numbers attending.

I reflected that it is to enable such frontline mission in difficult places that must be the priority of our coming together in the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and beyond. And so it has proved in Samsun.

It was the BWA general secretary who first met Pastor Orhan some nine years ago. The EBF Mission Partnerships program offered support to Pastor Orhan to plant a second congregation.

EBM International (European Baptist Mission) has demonstrated a great commitment and support to Turkey and the newly-founded Turkish Baptist Alliance, especially in the support of the church at Izmir and the work carried out among Syrian refugees in Izmir and Adana.

Different parts of the Baptist family have come together so that the courageous and strategic witness of the Samsun Church might be supported and strengthened and that this church will know for sure that, when times are difficult and challenging, it is part of a praying supporting community of Baptists in Europe and the Middle East, and indeed all over the world.

Tony Peck is BWA regional secretary for Europe and general secretary of the European Baptist Federation. These are excerpts from a report to the BWA Executive Committee in March 2017.
We broadcast our sermons weekly via the Internet. We also prepare videos during the week explaining the Gospel and broadcasting them online. I sometimes wonder, “How many people watch the videos? What are the results? Of those watching the videos, why don’t they believe?”

God is telling us there is a time for all things. Last year when I went on a prison visit, the governor of the prison told me he was following my video messages and that he accepted the Lord (he is now serving in another city).

I recently experienced an event that encouraged me very much. It concerns a young woman who became a believer! This is really a very difficult thing in the Turkish reality. She was a very strict Muslim evidenced by the way she dressed. Her life would be under threat if it is known she had converted to Christianity. She told me her story in tears:

I did not know you and I hated the Christians and for this reason I intended to make fun of you when I started watching your videos on the Internet. But the things I was hearing from you spoke to me of a love I was always looking for. The words of faith and courage were driving out my fears. I was very much impressed by these things. They even entered my dreams but I was afraid of coming to the church, though I wished I could give my life to the Lord and become a Christian. Finally I took the step and gave my heart to the Lord.

When I returned home after our conversation I looked up her Facebook page and saw that she is constantly sharing the Gospel on Facebook. I told her to be careful in doing this because of the resentment she might cause. She sent me this message:

I want to tell you again what I already told you some two years ago. I saw the Gospel in my dream. It was one month before I came to the church. In my dream Jesus led me to the church, asking me “What are you still waiting for? Follow my way.” And I saw all of you in there waiting for me, smiling at me. Before I met you I saw you in my dream. Thanks be to God.

This is really a miracle. Our living God is inviting souls in this way to the Lord Jesus. May God forgive me because I often said, “This man is a very hard Muslim and I don’t think he shall ever believe.” But this event was a lesson for me. Saul was also a hard case but he later became Paul. These things happened 2,000 years ago and they are still happening today.

This young girl is still wearing her headscarf. Having hundreds of friends on Facebook does not stop her spreading the Gospel to others. I do not hide from you that I am still worried because of the likely opposition of her family and her surroundings. I ask you to pray for her so that she may grow in the faith and gain entrance to a university in another city. She feels a bit uneasy in the church because she...
UK CHURCHES OPPOSE ACTIONS AGAINST REFUGEE CHILDREN

CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM expressed dismay at a change that would end the policy of admitting refugee children into the island nation.

The so-called Dubs Amendment, or Immigration Act 2016, offers unaccompanied refugee children safe passage into the UK. It was named after its sponsor, Baron Dubs, a Member of Parliament, naturalized Briton and former refugee from Nazi-era Czechoslovakia.

The United Kingdom government, which took office after the “Brexit” vote in the UK in June 2016, announced in early February that the initiative would end as of March 31, 2017. Only about 350 children would have benefitted before it is brought to a close.

Six church leaders, including Lynn Green, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), said in a joint statement, “We are dismayed to hear, through the announcement from the Immigration Minister … of our government’s intention to suspend its program of resettling unaccompanied minors in March 2017.” They urged “the Government to reconsider this decision and to recognize the potential harm that this policy might cause.”

The statement over the signatures of the leaders of the Church of Scotland, the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Conference and the Quakers in Britain, pointed to the role the church has played in resettling refugees in the UK.

“Throughout the United Kingdom, our churches have sought to offer welcome and practical support to refugees and asylum seekers of all ages, often working in partnership with other faith and community groups.”

“...they are essential. Help to her in these matters. Your prayers cover her head. People may get the wrong impression but I am trying all the more to be helpful to her in these matters. Your prayers are essential.”

Though we have not yet secured all the money for the building of our church in Samsun we believe that God shall provide so that we finish the building. During this coming summer we may hold our baptismal service in this new building.

Though I would have liked to tell you in each of my letters that because of your prayers hundreds are coming to the Lord, this is not the case. Things do not happen so quickly. A man came to our church some three years ago. At that time I spent a lot of time with him but afterward he just was not here anymore.

He came back one month ago. He told me he went to France, that he got married and that he now has a child. He told me that whilst he was in France he thought a lot about the talks we had and that the time had now come for him to give his heart to the Lord. Three years ago he took a lot of my time. He saddened me because he left without even saying goodbye but now the right time came. This filled me with joy and I hope it is also encouraging for you as your prayers are not in vain.

It is exactly as the Bible tells us: The seed is sown, it grows quietly and then we see the outcome.

I thank you again for your prayers and assistance. God continues to do wonderful things by your prayers.

Orhan Piçaklar is pastor of Samsun Agape Church in Turkey and general secretary of the Turkish Baptist Alliance. Excerpts from a letter in March 2017 to BWA General Secretary Neville Callam

Callam pointed to Jesus who models hospitality by including those who are normally excluded. “It is our Christian task to open the door of welcome and compassion to those who suffer and are in pain,” Callam declared. “Hospitality to strangers is a value that is deeply ingrained in the lifestyle of a Christian.”

As far back as September 2015, Baptists in the UK offered 250 bed spaces for Syrian refugees. In a survey of Christians in the UK published in November 2015 by Embrace, a charity group, two in three Britons believed the government had not done enough to help Syrian refugees.

In March 2016, Baptists joined the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Conference and the United Reformed Church to urge “national governments, and especially our own UK Government, to support an innovative and compassionate response” to the exploding crisis of thousands of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa seeking security and safety in Europe.
BAPTIST PASTORS ARRESTED IN MYANMAR

The Myanmar government arrested two Baptist pastors last Christmas Eve, December 24, for allegedly engaging in espionage activities.

Alarm was raised from December into January after the whereabouts of both men, Langjaw Gam Seng, 35; and Dumdaw Nawng Lat, 65, went unknown. Suspicions arose that they were arrested and secretly spirited away by the military.

After weeks of silence, the country’s Ministry of Defense acknowledged on January 19 that the men had been arrested. Each was accused of being a “financial-supporter, informer, recruiter [and] rumor-monger” for groups in conflict with the military. Heavy fighting had occurred in Shan State, the area of their disappearance, between the government and a coalition of Kachin and three other ethnic guerrilla groups.

Supporters of the two pastors alleged that their arrest was reprisal for showing journalists a Catholic church that was damaged by military airstrikes. Photos of the bombed out church were posted on the Internet.

After they disappeared, several organizations such as Amnesty International and Fortify Rights called on the military to release the men. Human Rights Watch said “the disappearances raise grave concerns for the safety of the two men” and that the “military should immediately address these issues and allow the visiting United Nations human rights expert to visit the area.”

From December into January, the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), to which both men are affiliated, made repeated inquiries as to the men’s whereabouts without success. The government at first denied they were detained by the military until the acknowledgement came some three weeks later. KBC members were allowed to visit the pastors at a police station where the pair was jailed.

If convicted, the two pastors face up to six years in prison.

17 CHRISTIANS DIE IN TRAFFIC ACCIDENT

Seventeen Christians died and some 50 other persons were injured after a deadly traffic accident in the Indian state of Meghalaya on February 26.

Vijayesh Lal, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), said “a truck carrying the Christians overturned after the driver lost control of the same and hit a concrete railing, throwing most of the passengers in a deep gorge.”

Superintendent of police Sylvester Nongtnger said “preliminary investigations show that the accident took place due to rash driving. The truck was carrying nearly 70 people from three nearby villages, all of whom were heading to church.”

News sources indicated that 12 people died on the spot and four others succumbed to their injuries in the hospital. Nine out of the deceased were female, including a 13-year-old girl. A seventeenth victim died some time after.

“Fifty others, including the driver and the helper of the truck, have been seriously injured and have been rushed to nearby hospitals including the Shillong Civil Hospital,” Lal said.

Lal said the Christians were on their way to the Annual meeting of the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod.

“The EFI community conveys its heartfelt condolences and prayers to the bereaved families,” wrote Lal. “It has also offered to assist in the treatment of those with serious injuries and requests that prayers be mobilized for the families of the deceased and for the complete recovery of the injured.”
BRIAN STELCK, former president of Carey Theological College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, died on August 20, 2016.

Awarded a scholarship for excellence in preaching, Stelck served as a pastor, church planter, missionary and educator.

He spent eight years as a missionary with Canadian Baptist Ministries in Kenya, where he was involved in developing partnerships with Kenyan Christian denominations. The initiatives he led helped train hundreds of African pastors and church leaders.

Stelck worked as a member of the executive staff of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC) and developed expertise in international and intercultural education and development, missiology, evangelism and theological education.

Devoting much of his life to academia and ministerial formation, in 1994 Stelck became president of Carey Theological College, the primary educational arm of the CBWC, until his retirement in 2014.

He served almost 20 years as a trustee of Taylor Seminary in the city of Edmonton in Canada, one of the longest in that school's history, and was both a senator and frequent visiting professor at Regent College in Vancouver.

From 2005-2010, Stelck was a member of the Baptist World Alliance Academic and Theological Education Workgroup and of the Commission on Theological Education between 2010 and 2015.

He was a graduate of the North American Baptist Seminary and earned several degrees from the University of Alberta where his father, Charles, was a famous and award-winning petroleum geologist, paleontologist, stratigrapher and professor for more than 50 years. His father died in May 2016.

Memorial services were held on August 26 at First Baptist Church, Edmonton, and at Olivet Baptist Church in New Westminster, Canada, on September 7.

He leaves wife, Caryn; and sons, Matthew, Scott and Ryan.

ROBERT PARHAM, founder and director of Baptist Center for Ethics (BCE) and its website, EthicsDaily.com, died on March 5, in the city of Nashville, Tennessee, in the United States. He was 63 years old.

Parham was among a group of Baptist ethicists in the United States who joined forces in 1991 to create BCE to “address issues of personal ethics, ‘consensus issues’ such as racial reconciliation and substance abuse, and ‘cutting-edge issues’ such as health care and endangerment of the Earth.”

He resigned his position as associate director of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention to become executive director of BCE.

He was a well known advocate, appearing on established television stations and programs such as Fox News, CNN Talk Back Live, MSNBC News Chat, ABC World News Tonight and NPR's Morning Edition.

His written columns appeared in daily newspapers such as the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the Dallas Morning News, the Orlando Sentinel and the Tennessean. He was a regular contributor to the Washington Post’s “On Faith” webpage.

Parham produced or directed several EthicsDaily.com documentaries, including the award-winning “Beneath the Skin” and “Different Books, Common Word,” which aired on more than 130 ABC-TV stations in early 2010, and “Sacred Texts, Social Duty.”


He served on the Baptist World Alliance’s Commission on Freedom and Justice, Commission on Christian Ethics, Commission on Religious Liberty, Commission on Social and Economic Justice, Commission on Christian Ethics, Commission on Creation Care and the Resolutions Committee.

In 2011 Parham became the first recipient of The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board Century of Service Leadership Award.

Parham held degrees from Baylor University in Texas, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky and Georgetown University in Washington, DC, all in the United States.

Funeral service was on March 13 at First Baptist Church, Nashville, in Tennessee.

He leaves wife, Betsy; son, Chris; and daughter, Elisa.
THE DOOR TO OUR TRUE HUMANITY – UBUNTU

There are several stories in life that leave you with that wonderful feeling of hope and joy. These stories express the very essence of our humanity. Such stories remind us that we are all created in God’s likeness.

One such story is the peaceful march that took place in Soweto, South Africa, two years ago. Participants in the peaceful march were mostly white Afrikaners, soldiers who were deployed by the Apartheid government in townships, like Soweto, to suppress protests against the Apartheid system.

South Africa has since moved past that era. There was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that helped deal with what happened under Apartheid. However, wonderful Christians felt strongly that they needed to gather in Soweto and invite the residents to a peaceful rally as they marched in the streets to express their remorse over what took place almost 40 years ago.

Some who came to the march were children of soldiers struggling to live with bad memories of what their parents did during the dark days of Apartheid. Most of the marchers belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church. Leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church presented a request to both the South African Council of Churches and the Evangelic Alliance of South Africa to help organize the rally and the march.

The events of that day reminded us that we are all human beings created with God’s goodness in us. As Desmond Tutu argued in his book, Made for Goodness, God’s image in human beings is our source of goodness.

Usually June 16 is the day to commemorate the event in 1976 that ended in tragedy when soldiers shot and killed students who were on a peaceful march. Hector Peterson, a 13-year-old boy, was among the first victims of that fateful day. The recent peaceful march took place on June 16 to speak a message of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

But there are other stories that make one wonder and ask the question, “What has gone so wrong that human beings can be so full of hatred and prejudice toward fellow human beings?”

In the very same country where others are trying hard to show goodness and love, there are those who resist God’s goodness in them. One unfortunate example is a woman, Penny Sparrow, who posted a statement on Facebook in 2015 on New Year Eve’s. Her posting ended with these words: “From now on I shall call all black South Africans monkeys as I see the cute little wild monkeys do the same, pick drop litter.” You cannot read her full post without feeling sad and disappointed.

This is a woman who is fortunate to live in the Durban area. She has the privilege to go to the beach anytime she wants. Unlike her, there are thousands, if not millions, of black South Africans who live in villages far from the beach. The only time these fellow South Africans can afford to visit the seaside is Christmastime and especially New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day. This is the time they are off from work and have received bonuses so they can travel. For those few days the beaches swell with people, especially black South Africans. This unfortunate woman wanted to have the beach for herself. She was angry because in her mind her space was invaded by creatures that are less human.

This incident got the nation to talk. This was the main statement that was put across: “We thought racism was gradually dying in South Africa since 1994, at the dawn of democracy, but we have come to realize that it is just hiding and waiting for some provocation.”

The story of Penny Sparrow is now in the media. She faced the might of South African law. She was found guilty of hate speech and was handed a heavy fine. She was expelled from her political party. But all that does not make the situation disappear. In her apology to the nation she defended her utterances, saying she was taken out of context.

My main concern is whether this unfortunate fellow South African is a confessing believer or not. I could not establish her beliefs. I was reminded of Christians who killed people as their service to the old South African government. Those Christians refused to go to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because they claimed they had already confessed to God. It is a matter of serious concern when confessing Christians do not find it wrong to promote hate or support a cause that promotes racism and hatred.

The church, including Baptists, needs to be seriously concerned that our faith in Christ makes us different in a world that promotes bigotry, racism, ethnicity and tribalism.

God led the BWA to come up with this great theme: JESUS CHRIST, THE DOOR. Christ is the door that leads us to our true humanity. In my South African context, true humanity is UBUNTU, the very essence of who we are as a people. It means I am because you are. It means I see myself in you and through you. Just as you are my neighbor, I am your neighbor. We are one people in one village. Everything belongs to us; we share because it belongs to all of us.

Sin has spoiled God’s wonderful village. It has made us discriminate against one another and to think some are not like us and therefore they do not deserve a good life.

Our hope is Christ, the door, because we see one door without partitions; one common door that leads to life. Our story should be the one of true humanity – Ubuntu in Christ, who said love your neighbor as you love yourself. Christ, the door, is the message that speaks against all forms of hate, including the new forms of racism that masquerade under a cloak of nationalisms. We, who have walked through Christ, the door, have been transformed. We now speak the message of love and condemn all forms of hate, racism, xenophobia, tribalism and bigotry. For God so loved the world.

Amen.

PAUL MSIZA, PRESIDENT

MEMORIAM

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