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A Chibok Mother's Pain  See page 12

WOMEN at the FOREFRONT
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30 Book Notes

This issue begins with a focus on eight BWA women who have made exceptional contributions and sacrifices for God’s work around the world.
Inset: Mama G from Uganda, one of the featured women, works on a “finger labyrinth” with members of her sewing class.

Unless otherwise noted, photos in the issue are by BWA staff.
Known by our LOVE

In his book, Biography as Theology, James McClendon did not set out to use biography as a resource for identifying models of Christian living. Instead, his intent was to use biography as a way of doing theology. If McClendon’s aim was a worthwhile one, the use of biography as a way of modeling Christian spirituality is also desperately needed in the world today. Indeed, hardly can one mine the treasures of a personal life to gather a theological harvest without simultaneously implying that that life provides an example of the way Christians should or should not live.

Recently, many people reflected on a life that came to an end with the passing of Noel Vose, BWA president from 1985-1990. Those who knew Dr. Vose would consider him a good candidate for inclusion in a sanctoral cycle, if Baptists actually had one.

In his book, If God so Loved: Studies in 1 John, Vose states, “It’s a good witness who begins and ends his testimony with Jesus Christ. See the first and last three sentences in 1 John.” He then adds, “To feed on doctrine without fellowship is like swallowing salt without the soup.” Toward the end of the book, he asserts, “Any Christian who has reviewed his or her commitment and been reassured concerning possession of eternal life can’t help but share the faith with others. . . . The test, from which no one is exempt, requires neither notebook nor pen. The ultimate measure of all Bible knowledge is its practical application in love to God and love for one another.”

In his last book, Mena: Daughter of Obedience, Vose completed the work started by his wife, Heather, who predeceased him. In Mena, Vose redeems from obscurity a woman whose story is as interesting as it is illuminating. The author, a distinguished Baptist who is known, respected and loved around the world, understood the significance of telling the story about a Christian woman who belonged to the Catholic Church. In his “Author’s Note,” Vose offers this comment: “[H]ow [can] I as author, with a strong Protestant heritage. . . . present here, with obvious sympathy, the fervent Catholic convictions of my subject. . . . If in the telling, Mena’s story adds a link to the ecumenical understanding between two major sections of Christianity, sharing the same faith in Jesus Christ as the ultimate meaning of life, so much the better.”

The man who preached love and lived it showed us how to receive those who do not fully embrace our theological convictions, but who share our commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. Not surprising, during his BWA presidency, he contributed to the first round of bilateral theological dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church. Later, he gave strong support to the international dialogue commission involving the BWA and Mennonite World Conference.

In those early days of BWA’s involvement in bilateral conversations, participants took very careful steps in order to build up confidence in the project on which they were pioneering and, undoubtedly, Vose expected the preliminary discussions with both the Catholics and the Mennonites to be followed by collaborative action by the dialogue partners, accompanied by more substantive doctrinal discussions. Vose wanted to foster the fellowship of the saints in the bond of love.

Presidential Reports to the BWA General Council say as much about the presidents themselves as about the matters on which they report. Vose’s reports were constructive efforts to help Baptists appreciate the gift of unity that God has given them and to honor the command of love. In the report to the 1987 General Council meeting, he said this: “Our councils and congresses have great potential. . . . It has everything to do with demonstrating the mystery of the Spirit’s work in creating unity and love between the most unlikely candidates. Because Baptists are among the greatest individualists in the Body of Christ—both our strength and our weakness—international unity as it is manifested becomes a remarkable phenomenon to onlookers.”

In his final report, presented to the 1990 General Council, Vose offered guidance concerning what he identified as “vital strands in future Baptist World Alliance work.” He said:

Unity and diversity must be a distinguishing mark of BWA relationships within member bodies. . . . Since experiences of grace may be appropriated without the capacity to articulate them clearly, the result is sometimes a wide range of expressions as to what Baptists believe. At first sight, the enquirer is left with a marked sense of diversity, but this is deceptive, for there is a strong cohesive factor which transcends organizational unity. It is vital to grasp the motif of unity within an accepted diversity. This means that the Alliance must be an inclusive body, not exclusive. Faith and our endemic frailty demand that we make room for one another’s freedom. As to unity, no one part of the membership has the spiritual authority to impose its views arbitrarily on the whole: freedom to hold its views, yes; freedom to express them, yes; but freedom to impose, no; not while bearing the name Baptist.

Vose ends one of his presidential reports with the charge, “Guard the Alliance; pray for it.”

I treasure the handwritten notes of encouragement I received from Dr. Vose over the last nine years. In the final one, dated July 13, 2015, he said, “At 93+ I am beyond travel, but I wish I could be with you once again. I still regard the presidency (1985-1990) as one of the most significant chapters of my life and ministry.”

We have lost a herald of unity, a prophet of love and a man of faith who saw the world through the eyes of a committed and thoughtful Christian. In him God gave us an example worthy of emulation. Do accurate narratives on our life reveal that people know we are Christians by our love?
Beth Echols: Standing on Principles
By Eron Henry

Beth Echols filled a variety of roles in her long and distinguished life, from standing up to white supremacists and segregationists, to serving as a college chaplain, to being ordained to the Christian ministry, to working as an advocate and reporter in the capital of the United States, to becoming the wife of a United States congressman.

Despite all these roles and more, Echols, now 92 years old, described her seven-plus years as the executive director of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department as the most difficult and challenging in her professional life and career. Asked why that was so, she simply replied, “we never had enough money.” Resources were always limited and in short supply in executing the work of the global Baptist women’s organization.

But she described her time at the BWA as among the most fulfilling and meaningful in her life. “It was the job of a lifetime for me!” she stated. “I loved it.” For her, “meeting women from around the world was the most memorable experience.” One particular group of women holds a special place in her heart. “Papua New Guinea has the best women,” she said.

Her life had, however, traversed various paths before she landed at the BWA in 1987. As “a farm girl” in rural North Carolina she “grew up believing that God had a special mission for her and her life.” Upon graduating high school and with the strong support of her congregation, Abbots Creek Baptist Church, she enrolled at Mars Hill College (now Mars Hill University) in North Carolina followed by the Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) Training School, part of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Her second appointment after leaving the WMU Training School brought her in conflict with the White Citizens Council of Louisiana. At first, she was chaplain for the student department for Kentucky Baptists for 11 years before taking up a similar position for Baptists in Louisiana. According to Echols, she grew up on a farm without being exposed to the realities of segregation, where her playmates included black children and where blacks, who lived and worked on the farm, were treated no differently from whites.

She was fated to work as chaplain during the Civil Rights era in the 1950s. College and university students “and some pastors, unfortunately not many,” got caught up in the movement. Those who did were “targeted by the White Citizens Council for (Continued on next page)
"I took a strong stance against racial segregation. . . . Some of the Baptist pastors who were segregationists wanted Louisiana Baptist [Convention] to fire me.”

sponsoring meetings between black and white students.” Her decision to sponsor such meetings – black and white students together – also drew the ire and objection of pastors. “Some of the Baptist pastors who were segregationists wanted Louisiana Baptist [Convention] to fire me.” The pastors did not succeed at first due to the support and connections she had with the Baptist students on the various campuses in Louisiana.

The White Citizens Council “wrote me up in their paper. I was on the front page.” The council eventually prevailed upon the convention and that led to her firing.

She explained her stance in simple terms. “Without trying to be noble, I took a strong stance against racial segregation and was eventually fired from the Louisiana [Baptist] State Student Department.” For Louisiana Baptists, “the firing was deemed necessary” and was done ostensibly “to protect me from physical harm in certain parts of Louisiana.” She suggests the fear was genuine. “They feared for me going into north Louisiana because of the segregation that characterized so many of our churches there.”

This firing led her back to Washington, DC, where she previously served for two years at First Baptist Church in Washington, between her time at Mars Hill and the WMU Training School. “My dear parents went to their graves not knowing why their beloved daughter left a job she loved with Louisiana Baptist students to go ‘live with friends in Washington, DC, and to look for another job.’”

Her transition to the nation’s capital was aided by Robert Denny, who was BWA associate secretary for youth at the time, and eventually became BWA general secretary in 1969, serving until 1980. The Dennys invited Echols to attend the Baptist World Congress in Miami Beach in 1965 and then to live with them for a time. She called this her “Briar Patch” (taken from a Br’er Rabbit story) because “I moved there without a job and everything started happening that was good for me.” She also explained that it was “at the Baptist World Congress where I caught a vision of working with the BWA.”

She worked at the Baptist Joint Committee (BJC) on Public Affairs (now the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty) for a number of years during the 1960s. With BJC she served as a journalist, writing and sending reports from Capitol Hill, the nation’s congress, to a variety of news outlets, including Baptist Press. But she felt the sting of discrimination. “One of the problems I experienced then was the prejudice against women.” The new director who took over refused to allow her to continue using a byline – for her name to appear on the stories she wrote, a practice that prevailed before – and wanted her immediate boss’s name to appear there as the editor instead.

“I loved my time living in Washington, working on The Hill and writing for Baptist Press,” but she left the position and worked for a US congressman. She eventually served on the staff of Takoma Park Baptist Church in Washington before joining the staff at Mclean Baptist Church in Virginia, where she was ordained in 1987, the same year she joined the BWA staff.

Echols was widowed twice. Her first husband, Robert MacClaren, a scientist, died in 1986. Her second, lawyer and congressman, M. Patton Echols, Jr., passed away in 2012.

The BWA has been part of Echols’s life for decades, and this did not end with her retirement as BWA women’s director in 1995. Her association with the BWA began in 1958 when she attended the Baptist Youth World Conference in Toronto, Canada. Wanting to share this experience, she sponsored a group of students to accompany her to the next youth conference in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1963.

She said her time at the BWA “seemed to be the culmination of all my interests and experiences;” a reason, perhaps, why she continued her interest in international affairs after retirement and offered her support to the BWA Women’s Department whenever she could.

YUKIMO YONEMOTO: Former Buddhist to Lead Baptist Women in Japan

“I am the first Christian in my family. My family is Buddhist.”

The Japan Baptist Women’s Union (JBUW) of the Japan Baptist Convention has a new executive secretary, Yukimo Yonemoto, who began her term of office on April 1. It is the culmination of a journey that began in 2003 when Yonemoto made her profession of faith in Christ, leaving her Buddhist background behind. Sensing a call to the full time ministry of the church, she enrolled as a theology student at the Seinan Gakuin Baptist University in southwest Japan and graduates in 2016.
That journey of faith began in the United States while visiting a friend and helping at a church summer camp in the state of Michigan. That trip coincided with her having to deal with a broken heart. Prior to traveling to the US, “my ex-boyfriend [left Japan], went back to Brazil and broke up with me and I was sad and cried.”

At the camp, “I worked as a children’s nanny and heard sermons in nature,” Yonemoto explained. She realized “God created the sky and lake.” During worship at camp, “I wanted to cry when I heard hymns.” She made the step of faith before leaving Michigan and returning home to Japan. “I finished camp and packed, walked down the mountain and stayed at another lake and saw the sunset and felt warm and knew it was Jesus caring about me. I believed and it changed my heart.”

A priority was to find a church home when she returned to her country. “I went back to Japan and started going to my neighborhood church, which was a Baptist church in Nagoya, and six months later at Christmas I was baptized.” Yonemoto became actively involved in church, attending Bible study and early morning and evening prayer meetings.

After working at her place of employment for seven years, she was offered a permanent full time position that would help secure her financial future. It so happened, however, that the offer came just about the time she wrestled with the call to the Christian ministry. It was not easy. She delayed making a decision but was unhappy. “I didn’t like the decision and complained and got depressed.”

The massive earthquake that struck Japan on March 11, 2011, broke the deadlock. “I saw footage of people on TV who never complained even though they lost families and I felt ashamed for complaining.” She spoke with her pastor, made a tour of the university and spoke to her family. “I am the first Christian in my family. My family is Buddhist.” She, however, got unqualified support from her father even before she told him in specific terms her intent to go to theological school. “My father told me to go to theology school even though I didn’t tell him I wanted to go.” This, to her, was confirmation of her decision.

She started out her training to become a pastor but was asked to consider taking up the position as leader of the JBWU instead. “I was unsure but decided to take it because I thought my experience and travel would help.”

Yonemoto told the Baptist World Alliance that though Japan Baptists embrace female pastors, these women face challenges. At her school, only seven of 25 in her group are women. Out of some 300 or so pastors in the Japan Baptist Convention, only about 50 are women, the majority of whom lead small, rural churches.

“Women are not treated equally as men. Churches don’t invite women pastors and women pastors go to very small churches. Local churches call pastors but they don’t know who is available so the convention chairman will match pastors to churches.”

She said, for churches, “a lot won’t ask women.” There is bias toward someone who is married. “Churches also want married women over those who’re single.” All this is compounded by the notion that churches do not expect, or are not used to having, women as pastoral leaders. Instead, “the church expects male pastors to have a woman to help with the work.”

Yonemoto takes up leadership of the JBWU when it celebrates its 25th anniversary, having been founded in 1971 at the 25th annual meeting of the Japan Baptist Convention. Her challenge is dealing with an aging and dwindling membership and participation.

“Members are decreasing; there are no new members and members are getting old.” High school and university age girls and women have “other, more attractive things to do” and are “too busy to go” to meetings. Those who do go to church are attracted to Pentecostalism.

She does not see the need to compete with the Pentecostals but believes that Baptists need to address the worship experience in their congregations. This will be a focus of hers going forward, along with the mission work of the convention and the JBWU, which includes having missionaries in other countries, such as Rwanda.

For Melody Maxwell, teaching the next generation of Baptist leaders is about passing on the opportunities and values that others have instilled in her.

“From my childhood, Christian leaders invested in me, training me in biblical knowledge and reminding me of God’s special plan for my life,” Maxwell recalls. “One of my most formative experiences was working at a Baptist girls’ camp in Tennessee (USA). Camp leaders took a risk on a shy teenage counselor. By the end of the summer, I was enthusiastically leading the entire camp in story and song!”

This experience was central to Maxwell’s call to ministry, to which she responded during her years at Baptist-affiliated Union University in Tennessee. Today she has answered that call by instructing students in Christian studies courses similar to those she completed.

As a professor at Howard Payne University in Texas in the United States, Maxwell teaches classes in Bible, mission and Christian history. She frequently reflects on the relationship between her own studies and her teaching.

“On my first day of full-time teaching in 2013, I thought back to the professors whose wisdom and friendship had shaped my...”
“A Bible study by a Nigerian? Conversation with an Australian? Workshop by a Palestinian? Dinner with a Canadian? . . . I had had the privilege of interacting with Baptist leaders from around the world; now it was time to share this rich experience with others.”

Maxwell explains, “In some sense it was like I was passing on what I had learned to my students. I had had the privilege of interacting with Baptist leaders from around the world; now it was time to share this rich experience with others.”

Among others, Maxwell’s student Mikayla Warren was thankful for the opportunity to participate in such a meaningful event. “Getting to share life and experiences with people from all over the world was such a remarkable and eye-opening experience for me,” she affirmed. “The trip was full of a lifetime of stories and memories and friendships.”

Stories, memories, and friendships – now not Maxwell’s alone, but imparted to her students as well. In God’s strength, Maxwell has used her past experiences to shape a new generation of believers for influence today and into the future.

Will other global Baptists do the same?

ALIA ABBOUD: Standing in the Gap for Refugees

Ali Abboud is at the forefront in the fight to meet the needs of Syrian and other refugees in Lebanon. The director of development and partner relations for the Baptist-affiliated Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD) brings many skills to this job. These include program development, management and evaluation, community development, strategic planning, research, capacity building, fundraising and proposal writing.

These skills, coupled with a strong Christian faith, make Abboud an effective advocate for the suffering and the vulnerable. This calling has roots in her experience while growing up. A Lebanese, she grew up in Sierra Leone in West Africa before returning to Lebanon “as a teenager to pursue her interest in empowering the Arab Church to be transformative in society.”

The stability of family life was affected by the Lebanese Civil War, which raged from 1975-1990. The family fled as refugees to Syria’s capital, Damascus. She told World Magazine that, with snipers ruling the streets of Beirut and its environs, she remembers her father saying to her and her siblings, “run as if your life depends on it – because it does.”

Having experienced life in vulnerable situations, she committed to assisting those in similar circumstances. “I know what it’s like to be dependent on others,” Abboud stated. She worked with World Vision Lebanon for 13 years, from 1990-2003, as communications officer and then operations manager, doing development work on the behalf of the vulnerable, especially children. Abboud took up her current position with the LSESD in 2003, working more directly with the Baptist and evangelical community in Lebanon and the wider Middle East and North Africa.

In her time with LSESD, also known as the Lebanese Baptist Society, she has seen more than her fair share of refugees and displaced persons, from Lebanese affected by conflicts in Lebanon itself, to Iraqi and Syrian refugees crossing the borders into the country. The current civil war in Syria is especially grave. “The needs both in Syria and in Lebanon are staggering and the situation gets more complex by the day,” said Abboud.

On a monthly basis, Lebanese Baptists offer assistance to more than 2,000 Syrian families and 400 Iraqi families in Lebanon,
nearly 6,000 families in Syria and more than 140 families inside Iraq. Support includes food distribution and health care, as well as vocational training and education for 300 Syrian refugee children. Special workshops are also held for women.

“Again and again, we are witnessing God’s hand at work both within our partner churches in Lebanon and in Syria, and through them,” Abboud said.

All this work comes from deep theological sensitivity. “Jesus was concerned about the poor, the disadvantaged, the downtrodden and the marginalized,” she wrote in an article for BMS World Mission. “Christians do not condone injustices! Yet we can pursue means and ways of addressing the consequences of unjust situations, like the church in Lebanon and Syria is doing today in their response to the needs of Syrian families negatively affected by the raging war in their country.”

Abboud’s portfolio includes more than refugees and other displaced persons. She works closely with the Arab Baptist Theological School, a ministry of LSESD that provides theological education and ministerial training for men and women to become church leaders in the Arab world in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia in North Africa; and Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon in the Middle East.

A proud development with which she has been closely associated is LSESD’s SKILD Center for Smart Kids with Individual Learning Difficulties, “a nonprofit organization and center specialized in helping children with special needs and learning differences reach their full potential.” It offers professional assessment and evaluation as well as a range of intervention services including speech therapy, special education, psychomotor therapy and counseling.

While taking spiritual formation seriously, Abboud recognized the value of equipping herself academically and professionally. She has an MBA degree from Eastern University in Pennsylvania in the United States, a Master’s Degree in Sociology from the Lebanese University and is in the process of pursuing a doctoral degree at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland.

“Christians do not condone injustices!”
— Alia Abboud

MAMA G:
Mother for Everyone

By Trisha Miller Manarin

“Mama G” is the new name of a beautiful South Sudanese woman living in Uganda. Valia, now known as “Mama G,” left her home country in 2006 to escape danger and, perhaps, even death. Both her father and husband encouraged her to flee their home and start anew. Uganda is an open country to refugees. She traveled with her five children via plane from Khartoum to Juba and then by bus, landing in Kampala. Eventually her nephews and those of her husband joined her, totaling 17 children in her home.

Early on, Mama G spent most of her time sitting at home with nothing to do. She could not speak English, but only Arabic and her home language. Still, she held tight to the belief that “God is very good – our God is not a poor God! God provides through our prayers. We have hope in God.”

In 2009, while attending the South Sudanese church’s Bible study in Kampala, she met Shelah and Jade Acker, founding directors of Refuge and Hope International, a ministry “empowering refugees with educational, professional and personal development opportunities so they can thrive in Uganda and beyond!” The Ackers were planning to open the Centre of Hope in a few weeks. Mama G was the first student to register! She brought other refugee students from all over East Africa. Mama G said she recruited other groups as well to take classes in English, crafts and cooking.

Since 2009, the Centre of Hope has grown exponentially. Mama G has been a central figure at the school. She now speaks English quite well and is able to share with other students in English, Arabic and her heart language. In 2011, she was given a scholarship to attend sewing training, which led to her becoming the first sewing instructor at the center in 2012. From a refugee without a sense of purpose, she became a paid employee, giving back to other refugees. She now oversees the sewing program classes and teaches advanced sewing skills to refugee women. The sewing program expanded and grew, now comprising three additional teachers and a manager.

More impressive than her teaching or English skills is her love for everyone! Her kids at home said, “Mama, are you mama for every child?” Mama G replied, “Yes! I am mama for everyone!” From this conversation, her name was changed to “Mama G” – “G” for general, because this mama is for all.

(Continued on next page)
Just like the labyrinth helps guide those who use it for prayer, so Mama G helps guide those looking for a purpose, looking for hope – looking for a mama.

to walk it. They also sewed labyrinths to be used with one’s finger. Mama G continues sewing them for students. For many who come to the Centre of Hope, they do not know where to begin, but just like the labyrinth helps guide those who use it for prayer, so Mama G helps guide those looking for a purpose, looking for hope – looking for a mama.

Trisha Miller Manarin is executive coordinator of the Mid-Atlantic Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in the United States.

Left: Refugee women in Uganda create a prayer labyrinth

She welcomes students into the community; she nurtures them, loves them and treats them like her own. A young refugee came to the center not too long after Mama G’s arrival. Mama G took her under her wing, like a mother hen to her chicks, and has treated the young student and her siblings as if they are her own family. She paid fees for her young friend to attend training. She continues to mentor her. This mentee has now become a co-teacher who teaches the beginner level students.

All the while, Mama G’s husband remains in South Sudan. It is there where he works, offering his best to cover rent and school fees for the many children living with his beloved wife in Kampala, Uganda. She, too, is giving her best to provide for their children.

Lives are being transformed as the love of God shines through Mama G’s smile, enthusiasm and love of life. Her magnetic personality has opened doors for other refugees to learn English, to be trained in new skills and, most of all, to experience the Good News. In recent days, she has also assisted at the women’s safe shelter. Mama G is often a cheerleader for these vulnerable and traumatized women.

She mothers those who have lost parents, siblings and even spouses or children. Her warm embrace, yet firm ability to speak the truth and help point the way for those who have lost all sense of direction, has guided students and given hope when all was taken from them. She says of the younger students at the center, “it is difficult to be in the middle of older people. I want to be near them, and help them while they are still young.”

Mama G’s message for the world is, “let us love each other, to be with each other, to respect the younger ones, give them love, to help with anything we have – even if we don’t have it to give – not only by money, but words, prayers.”

In 2015, Mama G and others in the sewing class were introduced to the prayer labyrinth. They created a labyrinth with materials found on the compound of the center, allowing them...
“Whom shall I send? Send me.”

I was brought up within the church, carried there as a babe in arms. Orchard Place was my second home. My family was there, my friends, my spiritual teachers. It was the place I went to socialize and just hang out. At age 14, during baptism service, I clearly felt God’s hand leading me forward and that very night I went through the waters of baptism knowing with all my heart that I belonged to Jesus.

At age 14 I started teaching Sunday School to children that lived on a nearby council estate. I loved working with these young children and letting them know how much Jesus loved them. I was happy doing what I was doing, but something was missing. I still felt as if God was pushing me but I did not know why. Maybe God wanted me to become more involved in the life of the church, so at 17 I started working with our local Baptist Youth Association. I loved it and felt I was doing what God wanted me to do – teaching Sunday School to children, working with youth. Surely God was using me but there was still this unsettled feeling that would not go away.

At 17 I started work for the DVLA, the British equivalent of the DMV in the United States (Department of Motor Vehicles). I enjoyed my job and was there for seven years. During that time I became more involved both at church and with our Youth Association. At age 22 I went with my church on a tour of the Holy Land, which had a tremendous impact on me. When we came back, that feeling of “not doing enough” still haunted me. What more could God possibly ask of me?

I was home alone one afternoon when God spoke to me clearly in a way that I cannot explain. I called South Wales Baptist College in Cardiff and spoke to Principal Dafydd Davies. The conversation went like this: Me: “Principal Davies, I feel that God wants me in the Gospel ministry.” Principal Davies: “I am putting a prospectus in the mail. Go see your pastor.” As I hung up the phone such a sense of calm enveloped me and I felt a peace that did indeed pass all understanding.

I did go see my pastor who was and still is my biggest supporter. I expected Rev. Cliff to say, “let’s think about this.” Instead his words to me echo to this very day. “Bethania (he always called me that), at last.” We discussed the process of entry into ministry whereby “the call” is tested by the local church, the Baptist association and the college committee.

After four years of training for the Gospel ministry I was ordained in 1988 and became pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Swansea, South Wales. At this time I was the second woman to be ordained in South Wales Baptist. However, for me it was never about being a woman in ministry, it was and still is about being a pastor who happens to be a woman. This is the difference between “a dream” and “a call.” Many women dream of being pastors and that’s ok, but when it’s a call our gender becomes irrelevant. I know this will probably offend some women but for me it’s about “The Call.” I urge all leaders, male or female, to test their call thoroughly, make sure it’s God’s voice that you are heeding and not just a dream.

I am on the verge of retiring from congregational ministry after 30 years and through all this time I hope and pray that I have remained true to my calling.

“Whom shall I send? Send me.”

Beth Willetts recently retired from her position as co-pastor of Calvary Hill Baptist Church in Fairfax, Virginia, in the United States.

HELEN GOLDBIE:
Loneliness in the Mission House

“A common experience that spouses of clergy often face is loneliness. This was the experience of Helen Goldie, who is married to Archie Goldie, former director of Baptist World Aid who, upon leaving the Baptist World Alliance, worked with the United Bible Societies in the United Kingdom.

Helen’s experience of loneliness is one of the many highlights in her book, Life, God’s Plan: The Wonder of it All. “I don’t mind emphasizing my loneliness. It was my loneliness that made me cry out to the Lord and he told me to write a book,” she explained.

That loneliness came out of being the primary caregiver for five children at home while her husband was busy with church responsibilities and travels, which began long before he became BWAid director in 1981, serving until 1990.

Even though she was not afraid to speak about her experiences, she was concerned the book focused too much on her. “What bothered me a bit was that it’s a lot about me and it’s a lot about my feelings as I went through life and living that life.”

Asked how she dealt with those times of loneliness, she responded, “I don’t know how else to say it. The Lord carried me through.” It was in that “loneliness where I finally thought of the Bible and started thinking, well, what would Jesus do?” She presented her emotions and feelings up to God, from whom she received this affirmation, “Your trouble is my trouble.” That crying out to God and that affirmation helped her “to get on with things.”

Archie, after serving as a pastor of churches in Canada, became the mission secretary for the Baptist Federation of Canada. This involved traveling to churches throughout the North American country, the second largest in the world by land mass. These travels often took him away from home overnight. “He’s visiting at nights and he’s out to meetings and he’s doing all these things and people don’t realize how much that happens.”

His position as mission secretary also took Archie overseas, such as to the Middle East and Europe. Such overseas commitments only intensified after he became BWAid director. But in the midst of the challenge, Helen Goldie embraced the blessings that came with being part of her husband’s life and ministry:

The world had opened up before our very eyes. We had witnessed the wonder of God’s creation in so many ways.

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countries. We met many marvelous people and countless churches. We were busy extending God’s kingdom here on earth. We had seen the generosity of many in the Christian faith who contributed to the work of the Baptist World Alliance. We had seen the growth of faith in some unexpected countries like Russia and some of these other places that had gone through so much.

Indeed, the BWA experience was unparalleled in what it revealed and what it aimed to achieve:

We had seen the hunger for Christ and the Bible. However, we had also witnessed the world’s thirsty, hungry and poor people, some in refugee camps, some after earthquakes and flood disasters. We’d seen the ravages of war and the horrible destruction it leaves behind. We’ve seen an indifference and denial of Christ forge its way into men and their cultures. However, Christ has taught us that we must keep witnessing to the world for his church. It is his church and it will not fail.

But when Archie took the position with the United Bible Societies working in Europe and the Middle East, she groaned. “That’s another trial for me. They asked him to go over there. He’s going to Europe and the Middle East and I’m going to England. I’m gonna be by myself again and I’m not sure I want this!” Even though “the Lord opened up the door [it] doesn’t change the fact that you can be lonely in these positions.”

One purpose of her book, she said, was the importance “to get the message that God helps you through every part of your life.” That includes the lonely times. It was her experience then, and it can be so for others now. “That’s why I go back to the beginning and tell my own story.”

Amina Ali, the only one of the girls to be rescued (in May 2016), said the girls are in the Sambisa Forest. Most are married. They are living under trees in the forest for all these 26 months without shelter or shade. They eat fruits from off the trees. The Nigerian Army bombed the Boko Haram store house and placed a blockade at the Sambisa Forest so they don’t have any means of getting food. They eat fruit from the trees.

Amina said six of the girls have died. Three died when the Nigerian Army bombed the Sambisa Forest. One girl died from a snake bite. Another died while delivering a baby. One girl was stoned to death.

The one stoned to death refused to recant her Christian faith. While they were teaching the Koran in Arabic, she sang Christian songs of praise. They asked, “Who is making that noise different from the others? If you don’t say who it is we will gun down all of you, we will shoot all of you.” She stood up and said, “I’m the one.” They told her to sit at the front, which she did. When they resumed reading the Koran she started to sing Christian praise songs again. They said, “Won’t you stop it?” She said, “It is better for me to die
in Christ than to live with you as a Muslim. I will never deny my faith.”

They dug a hole in the ground and buried her up to her neck, with only her head showing. They warned her, “If you don’t stop the singing, we will stone you to death.” She said Christians have been persecuted all over the world. She wants to die in Christ. She will never, ever deny her Lord Jesus. So they stoned her to death in front of all the Chibok girls.

Amina said they kidnapped some boys. Two escaped but were caught. They killed the boys in front of the girls as an example, and stoning the girl was another case of them setting an example. That scared them. No one else tried to escape because they feared the same thing will happen to them.

I don’t blame the Nigerian army. It is not the fault of the military. The guns they have were used to fight the Biafra. (Editor’s note: The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, was fought from July 1967 to January 1970). How could they use those guns to fight Boko Haram? The weapons Boko Haram have the Nigerian army doesn’t have. Boko Haram have the latest guns and equipment.

We are praying for the Americans and others to help the Nigerian army by giving them the necessary equipment. Not necessarily guns but there are new technical things that they can use to find where the girls are and that will help to bring them out without using guns. We hope they will help the Nigerian army and assist them in the rescue of our girls.

It is only by the grace of God and his blessings upon us that we are coping with the loss of our girls. We lost between 15 and 20 parents after this incident. Some were killed by Boko Haram. Some died of trauma and from the pain they went through. Some had high blood pressure and ulcer. Some have become paralyzed. They don’t eat any more. They were shocked.

We have received help and prayers and counseling from the Christian Brethren Church. The churches are the ones that have been trying their best since the abduction. Some even went to Chibok themselves, churches from different parts of the country and from different parts of the world.

We did not receive much help from the state government. The governor of the state came one week after the abduction, went to the school, gave a speech and left. He did not enter the town of Chibok. The Chibok families did not see him face to face until last year, around September or October. He came saying the president sent him to the parents and said they were trying their best to rescue the girls. They gave 100,000 naira (US$500) to each parent. The government hasn’t done anything else.

The president visited on January 14 and said they don’t know where the girls are. Yet they had a video since December 25 [last year] showing 15 of the Chibok girls. On April 13 the video was released by the Minister of Information as “breaking news.” It’s not breaking news because they had the video since December.

I want the United States to help us parents rescue our girls, to assist the Nigerian army in rescuing the girls. I want this country and other countries that are able to help to please rescue our girls, those that are still alive. By rescuing these girls they are also helping the parents. I have that hope in God that my daughter will come back. Every parent wants to see her baby close to her.

I want every parent to help to pray, serious prayers, so that the Lord Almighty will do that battle and rescue our girls, so that we will be reunited with our girls and get our happiness, our joy and our hope back.

The Baptist World Alliance has appointed Darrell Armstrong, a Baptist pastor in the state of New Jersey in the United States, as its chief administrative officer at the United Nations (UN). He succeeds attorney Mark Wiggs.

Armstrong, a BWA representative to the UN since 2013, will supervise the BWA team serving with the UN in New York, United States; Geneva, Switzerland; and Vienna, Austria. He will determine who, from the list of approved BWA representatives, will participate in the various events in which BWA desires to participate.

An author and human rights advocate, he has had a longstanding commitment to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and teaching religious tolerance.

“I am delighted that Darrell has consented to take up this new responsibility on a voluntary basis,” BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said. “I am confident that Darrell has the experience, giftedness and enthusiasm to serve as requested.”

Armstrong is pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey. In 2010, he was elected the first non-Presbyterian to Princeton Theological Seminary’s Board of Trustees.

He holds degrees from Stanford University in California in the US, Princeton Theological Seminary and The College of New Jersey.
he Baptist World Alliance sent a sum of US$15,000 in relief support to several neighborhoods in Ethiopia, which is facing one of the worst droughts in decades, triggered by El Niño and following successive poor rainy seasons.

According to the United States Agency for International Development, an estimated 10.2 million people are in need of relief food assistance and nearly six million people need water and sanitation services—

Since 1974, the BWA has had Special Consultative Status at the UN through the Economic and Social Council. BWA is also a member of the UN Committee of Nongovernmental Organizations, and enjoys consultative relationship with the Conference of NGOs (CoNGO), an international membership association.

The global organization has access to 41 nongovernmental organization (NGO) committees in New York, Geneva, and Vienna.

The BWA is also accredited as an NGO through the UN’s Department of Public Information (DPI), which enables it to participate in briefings and receive announcements from DPI; is a member of the Committee of Religious NGOs; and collaborates with the Ecumenical Working Group that provides a forum for common work on issues of concern to UN representatives of Christian World Communions.

BWA UN involvement includes Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) of the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), presenting alternative human rights reports on particular UN Member States.

At Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil in 2012, BWA co-sponsored side events and submitted documents contributing to the focus of the discussions there.

The BWA has actively participated in the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women by hosting side events.
Scenes from Ethiopia, facing one of the worst droughts in decades

Left: Photo courtesy of UNICEF Ethiopia/2016/Ayene
Insert: Photo courtesy of European Union/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie

figures that account for more than 60 percent of those impacted by El Niño globally. This may increase as the crisis worsens.

The BWA-funded project, which began on January 1 and ends October 31, was implemented in Amhara Regional State, North Shewa Zone, in the Minjar/Shenkora district. Nine kebeles, or neighborhoods, received help. Major beneficiaries were farmers in the selected kebeles where there were almost 47,000 individuals in more than 8,600 households. The majority, roughly 27,000, were women.

Six kinds of assistance were given, such as the purchasing and distributing of cereals available in the surrounding kebeles and districts, including wheat and beans, cooking oil and table salt; purchasing and distributing sanitation items; transporting tap water from surrounding towns by truck and the purchase and distribution of one water tank for each kebele for water storage; the drawing off of underground water as a permanent solution for water supply; and the purchasing and provision of straw, grass and by-product of flour from factories for cattle feeding.

During the rainy season, the BWA funding provided agricultural inputs such as seeds, pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer according to each household; as well as the purchase and distribution of exercise books, pens and pencils for students in the farmer villages.

“They did not get rain water for a long time, therefore they are destitute of food and water for themselves as well as for their cattle,” Ethiopian Addis Kidan Baptist Church, which implemented the project, explained. “Additionally, since their life is dependent on agriculture they have no money to buy stationary materials and send their children to school. During summer they are in need of seed to restart their life.”

For the second year in a row, Baptist World, the quarterly magazine of the Baptist World Alliance, received an award from the Religion Communicators Council (RCC).

The periodical received the RCC Shoestring Award on March 31 during the DeRose-Hinkhouse Memorial Awards Ceremony in New York City in the United States. The Shoestring Award “is given to one winner across all categories on the basis of the highest quality/best product, for the lowest cost.”

The judges said the “writing is clear and informative,” stated that the “editing overall is excellent,” and were impressed “that they were able to put together such a high quality magazine with no ads and such a small budget.”

In 2015, the October/December 2014 issue of the magazine won an award of excellence from the RCC for its attractiveness, use of images and color and content.

The DeRose-Hinkhouse Awards recognize the achievements of RCC members who demonstrate excellence as religion communicators.

Presentations were made in several broad categories: periodicals, including newspapers, magazines and newsletters; public relations materials such as brochures, posters, booklets and annual reports; public relations/advertising campaigns; news and feature writing; graphic design, art and photography; audio and video, broadcast, non-broadcast and cable; digital communications; and social media.

Other Baptists received recognition at the award ceremony, an event held during the RCC Annual Convention, which was held from March 30 to April 3.

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MALAWI:
Food Security Program

Baptist World Alliance, in collaboration with Baptist Development Service of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BCM), implemented a program to increase food security for 250 Malawi households.

The project grew out of a preliminary report of the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee in July 2015 that identified 25 out of 28 districts as food insecure for three to eight months out of each year. Three districts, Mangochi, Phalombe and Zomba, which were affected with floods, were chosen for the BWA-funded program.

“This year the country is facing the worst famine in decades,” wrote Andrew Gwambe, of the BCM. “Association leaders have approached the Baptist Convention Secretariat many times in request for food assistance for the affected people in their respective areas.”

Funds were used to improve food availability and increase crop production for the 250 households, as well as improve soil and water conservation on 25 hectares, or roughly 62 acres, of farmland. There was also medical, educational and daily upkeep assistance.

“The provision of seed to farmers shall assist to increase crop production and ensure self-sufficiency,” BCM stated. “The project shall improve food availability in the households of the beneficiaries through distributed maize grain.”

To this end, 1,000 bags of maize grain, 250 packets of maize seed and 2,500 tree seedlings were purchased and distributed. Some 250 farmers received instructions in soil and water conservation techniques.

A number of social benefits were expected to accrue from the program. “When hunger strikes, women become vulnerable because they are forced to do things that normally they would not do in order to have food for themselves and the children,” the BCM observed.

“When pregnant women do not have enough food they become malnourished, which is very dangerous to their health and that of the unborn baby.”

In addition, “the project is going to also have a positive impact on young people. They will be able to attend classes in school. When there is no food they spend time looking for ways to get food instead of going to school. When they manage to go to school, concentration is lost in class because their concern is always where to get the next meal.”

It will be positive for the environment. “The cutting down of trees to sell in order to get money for food will decrease. Introduction of this project will reduce deforestation.”

BAPTIST WORLD Wins Award continued

Brian Kaylor, vice chair of the BWA Communications Committee, won three Certificate of Merit awards: one for the partnership with Guatemalan Baptists in the February 2015 issue of the Churchnet digital magazine, and two for articles in Word & Way on the death penalty and on Union Mound Baptist Church.

Kaylor is generational engagement team leader for Churchnet and a contributing editor for Ethics Daily. Word & Way, a newspaper published by Baptists in the state of Missouri in the United States, is edited by Bill Webb, a BWA Communications Committee member.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) picked up Awards of Excellence for its Brand Rollout public relations campaign and the Offering for Global Missions fundraising campaign, and Certificates of Merit for Military Challenge Coin in the Special Print Material subcategory and its Logo and Visual Identity System.

Among those recognized for their CBF work were Jeff Huett, Aaron Weaver, Candice Young, Carrie McGuffin and Travis Peterson.

The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty based in Washington, DC, in the US, received Certificates of Merit for the James Dunn Obituary by Cherilyn Crowe and for Don Byrd’s Blog from the Capital.

An Award of Excellence was received by Philip Poole and Janica York Carter for their work on the Baptist-affiliated Samford University 2014-2015 Annual Report.

Eron Henry, BWA associate director of Communications and editor of Baptist World magazine, was elected to the RCC Board of Directors for the period 2016-2019.
Baptist Center Opened in
BULGARIA

The Sofia Baptist Church in Sofia, Bulgaria, opened its new Church and Social Educational Center in October 2015. In addition to a new auditorium for worship services, the facility includes a refectory to offer assistance to the homeless, a medical center, premises for educational and literacy programs for school dropouts, several conference halls, a library and offices. The official name of the new center and church is “New Birth” — a statement that this is a location where people will find a new beginning in their path.

Built over a period of 12 years, the construction was driven by two desires: “the need to be salt and light in the city where God has called us to serve him,” said church pastor Teodor Oprenov, as well as a growing need for a new place of worship for the congregation, the first Baptist church in Bulgaria, which was founded in 1888.

The center is designed to help meet spiritual and social needs in the Southeastern European nation. “Our country is one of the poorest in Europe,” explained Oprenov, who is general secretary of the Baptist Union of Bulgaria. “In such an economic environment vulnerable groups in society suffer the most — the elderly; institutionalized children; people with different disabilities, whether mental or physical; and people from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly those of Roma origin.”

The aim is to provide practical assistance that is free or affordable; offer facilities and services of the highest quality; establish a center that is financially self-sustaining; set new ethical standards of business relationships and services in Bulgaria; and provide facilities for a rapidly growing society to gather, worship and for the development and provision of social activities.

The center supports entrepreneurship and assists new businesses by providing business advice and small “starter premises.” In the long term it hopes to invest in new businesses to give people from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to improve their standard of living. The conference hall and offices provide avenues to generate income to help subsidize the social outreach program.

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Based on a social enterprise model, the center is designed to enable income generating activities that subsidize social outreach. Helping to drive the ministry is the Good Samaritan Foundation, which was set up in 1990 for social outreach.

Oprenov and his wife, Dimitrina Oprenova, a Baptist World Alliance vice president and president of the Baptist Women’s Organization in Bulgaria, have been serving in ministry for more than 25 years. They faced a number of challenges. Religion has had a complicated history in Bulgaria. For roughly 40 years, until 1989, Christian churches in Bulgaria were mainly controlled by the Law on Religious Organizations, which enumerated the limitations on religion and religious practices. After the political changes in 1989 new challenges faced the church, the level of poverty increased and many found the cultural changes impossible to cope with.

The events around the official opening of the new center and church included an evening of worship, prayer and appreciation to contributing sponsors; a concert with classical and Bulgarian music; an official ribbon-cutting; and a dedication ceremony. The special moment coincided with the annual Council of the European Baptist Federation, which was deliberately held in Sofia for the occasion.

Some 150 Baptist pastors and church leaders from all over Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia, representing as many as 40 national Baptist unions, gathered in Sofia. The council was addressed by the president of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rosen Plevneliev.

“My presence here is a sign of gratitude for everything achieved by the Bulgarian Baptist Union during the past century and a half,” said the Bulgarian president. “We shall never forget how during those first and most critical days and months, as Syrians, Iraqi and Afghans were seeking shelter in Bulgaria in large groups, you offered practical support to the refugee centers in Sofia with what was most essential: food, clothes, washing detergents, furniture. All of this was collected and donated with an attitude of Christian empathy for those who were hurting and had been deprived of home and family.”

Plevneliev expressed appreciation for Bulgarian Baptists’ efforts to serve orphans, to offer literacy programs to Roma children and to extend a hand of Christian love for the needy. “This beautiful newly built center is a home for a social kitchen for poor people, a medical facility, as well as an educational, religious and conference center. It will be of paramount importance for our society. And I am grateful for that,” noted the Bulgarian head of state.

In response to the president’s address, Tony Peck, Baptist World Alliance regional secretary for Europe and general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, expressed appreciation for the kind words and greetings. This center “will not only house a church that seeks to witness to its faith. It will also reach out to some of the poorest and most needy of this city,” said Peck. “In this, Sofia Baptists want to follow the example of Jesus himself in caring for the whole person, body, mind and spirit. They want to make their own positive contribution to the life of this city and Bulgarian society.”

The consecration of the new building comes when Bulgaria faces new and serious challenges, including a wave of refugees, internal migration to the country’s capital, economic stratification and ethnic tensions.

The opportunity to foster the social, cultural and educational ministries of Sofia Baptist Church is in harmony with the earliest traditions of evangelicalism in Bulgaria. In combination with an accent on evangelism, discipleship, prayer and Bible preaching, the main Baptist church in Bulgaria’s capital is in a position to continue serving as a beacon of Jesus Christ in Sofia during the coming decades.
**SWEDEN:**
*Treading a New Path*

By Eron Henry

The Uniting Church in Sweden (UCS) was formed by a merger of the Baptist Union of Sweden, the United Methodist Church of Sweden and the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden on June 4, 2011 and adopted its current name during a conference in Karlstad on May 11, 2013. The combined entity has roughly 70,000 members in 730 congregations, making it the second largest Christian group in the northern European country.

“Our name may be new, but we are deeply rooted in Christian history and the revival of Swedish Christianity," UCS declares.

UCS is in the process of forging a new path and identity while drawing from its various histories. “We are not a federation or anything like that. We are a new church and we have our headquarters and offices in Stockholm,” said Lasse Svensson, first president of UCS who was ordained a Methodist pastor. Though

“I think we’re actually the first denomination to be a part of the BWA and World Methodist Council.”

new, it is marked by the combined distinctives from the three traditions. “Methodists have their book of discipline, Baptists brought freedom and Mission Covenant brought good practice,” Svensson said.

The forging of a new identity includes UCS relationships with regional and international entities, such as the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance; the European Methodist Council and the World Methodist Council; as well as the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

“I think we’re actually the first denomination to be a part of the BWA and World Methodist Council,” said Svensson. “I think we might be the first, and for many people that’s very strange. They think I’m saying it wrong or something like that but it’s actually the truth.”

The impetus to form one church out of the three goes back more than 100 years. “The first meeting with representatives from these three denominations with the goal of forming something new together was held in Stockholm in 1905,” Svensson told the Baptist World Alliance. The process, though not followed through institutional framework to form one church body was already in place, pushed along by an ecumenical spirit and practical concerns and necessities: Baptists, Methodists and Covenant Christians forming congregations together; a single national youth body rather than three; one seminary formed out of several; and a single periodical publication instead of three.

Administrative structures and functions have now merged, with about 100 staff based in Stockholm, Sweden’s capital, and another 35-40 in regional offices.

UCS immediate and long-term priority is growth. “Out of our 730 congregations we have 200 that have 25 members or less,” said Svensson, who attended the 2015 Baptist World Congress in Durban, his second BWA event after attending the Annual Gathering in Izmir, Turkey, in 2014. These small churches struggle to even maintain their buildings and properties. “It’s not very easy,” Svensson declared.

A primary focus will be on church planting. In May 2016, UCS made a commitment to plant 50 new congregations over the next nine years. “That’s quite a bold statement because we have not been that good in the past, as denominations, to form or plant new churches. But we see that this is very crucial in our time in our country.”

A second focus is on youth and children. Dernulf revealed to the BWA that UCS’s youth arm has about 20,000 members and a total of about 30,000 active participants. Working with a staff of 12 persons, she hopes UCS can overcome the religious malaise of Swedish youth, who have not been attending church in large numbers. One plan is to reach youth through scouting, taking advantage of the roughly 10,000 scouts in the various troops affiliated with the UCS.

“Scouting had been going downhill for awhile but now it’s getting more and more popular again in Sweden, so that’s a good thing,” she said. “Everything we do is to present Jesus Christ to young people. Scouting, for example, is a good way because people in Sweden trust that kind of organization. They want to put their children in it, so it’s a good way to get in contact with people.”

Youth and children are also being reached through sports, such as football, and the arts, including dance.

Swedish Christians have, traditionally, been engaged in both justice and international issues, and this continues in UCS. “UCS wants to be a church with a strong involvement in present society,” the organization declares. “This applies to issues relating to refugees and migration, human rights, violence and abuse against women and children, as well as advocacy work for peace, security and sustainability.”

Second to Germany, Sweden has taken in more Syrian and other refugees than any other European country. “We’re a country of 9.5 million people in Sweden and we accepted 160,000 refugees from the Middle East last year. That’s a lot of people and it’s had a huge impact,” Svensson reported.

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Relatives of victims killed by a suicide bomber weep in Lahore, Pakistan.

“In Pakistan, it is getting very difficult for Christians to live and to breathe.”

Baptists among those Killed in Suicide Bombing

IN PAKISTAN

At least seven Baptists died in a bombing that killed more than 70 people on Easter Sunday, March 27, in the city of Lahore in Pakistan.

According to a Baptist World Alliance source in Lahore, 74 persons, 54 of them Christian, were among those killed by a Taliban suicide bomber at a park where Christians were celebrating after attending Easter Sunday services in their respective congregations.

A total of 39 children died, two of whom were Baptists.

The BWA source indicated that one Baptist member, a female, was still missing and unaccounted for.

“In Pakistan, it is getting very difficult for Christians to live and to breathe,” the source told the BWA.

He accused the government of not doing enough to protect Christians, a minority in the South Asian country, despite having known the threats they face. “Pakistan should have provided security to all minorities, but the government has failed,” he said.

Pakistan, a majority-Muslim country with a population of almost 200 million, has just over two million Christians.

“In Pakistan, it is getting very difficult for Christians to live and to breathe.”

Baptists among those Killed in Suicide Bombing

IN PAKISTAN

A desperate attempt to rescue victims of a suicide bombing in Lahore, Pakistan, on Easter Sunday.

Photo courtesy of Ary News

Sweden: a New Path continued

Swedish Christians have traditionally been engaged in justice and international issues, and this continues in UCS. . . . “refugees and migration, human rights, violence and abuse against women and children, as well as advocacy work for peace, security and sustainability.”

“I think last year 35,000 children came with no parents,” Dernulf stated. “That’s something to handle, and the church is a big part of it, trying to meet the needs. So that’s a big thing. We’re thinking a lot about how we can be part of this in a good way and how we can help them.”

“You can imagine when you have a village of 500 inhabitants and 200 refugees are settling there, that has an impact on society,” said Gerard Willemsen, who oversees international cooperation for UCS. “All of a sudden you have one-third of the people in the village coming from another part of the world. That has an impact on the church; it has an impact on everything. If you handle it well it could be very positive but if you handle it wrongly, it can be a disaster.”

UCS has worked with its churches to help accommodate refugees, some of whom take refuge in church buildings. Congregations cooperate in helping to meet refugee needs. Four persons deployed by UCS assist congregations in their outreach efforts, including guiding them in their advocacy on the behalf of displaced persons, such as meeting and writing to politicians. UCS members engage in social activities with refugee families, playing sports with them or sharing meals.

Approximately 100 congregations work with diversity issues and integration of new immigrants.

UCS currently has partnerships with churches and organizations in 27 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Eurasia. The international interest and involvement is varied. UCS is involved in “all kinds of work from development work in villages in India or supporting schools and hospitals in Congo, supporting small churches in Japan, working with oppressed churches in Azerbaijan in Central Asia, working with nomadic peoples in northern Siberia,” said Willemsen, who went to Sweden 25 years ago as a missionary from the Netherlands. “It’s very diverse and I’m happy that we have a good staff with several specialists in our office.”

But Europe has its issues, and UCS is concerned with recent developments on the continent, ranging from ingrained secularism to rising xenophobia to the growing refugee crisis. “Europe is a continent which needs mission,” declared Willemsen.

As UCS forges its way forward, it is coming to terms with its various diversities within, and the multiple challenges without.
Our visit to Idomeni refugee camp was full of expectations. Idomeni is a small village in Greece, near the border with the Republic of Macedonia.

We expected to see people being taken care of in reception centers throughout Greece, and the surrounding islands. Unfortunately, that was not what we saw. We were deeply shaken by the horrors that we saw in Greece, and the suffering that is the everyday experience for the refugees there.

We saw local people trying to help with what they have, and we also saw the other side of the coin, the hedonist Europe, seeking its own interests. We experienced how much the rest of Europe is ignoring Greece, and the ideals Europe usually stands for.

Our entrance into the illegal camp in Idomeni was a picture of dread: people who hadn’t eaten for three days, sleeping in the cold, begging for information about the borders, etc. Saif, a Syrian refugee, whose parents had been in Germany for more than three months, said, “it would have been better to have died in Syria, than suffer here at the gates of Europe.”

A lack of food, volunteers and doctors, and a lack of compassion from Europe caused two lives to be lost the day we got there.

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When we got to Idomeni, we were met by a scene of two men pouring gasoline over themselves and setting themselves on fire. That cry for help was aimed at people who think the refugees are “none of their problem.” It was supposed to awaken compassion.

On the other hand, every step we made through that camp felt like a step through a valley of blessings. Talking to people there felt like talking to God. We saw God’s provision every time we sat down to share a meal of boiled potatoes with families in the camp.

Most of the western world eats McDonalds and steaks, ungrateful for what they have. These people keep giving thanks for every bite they have. “Only God can help us,” said a mother of a small child, while we were eating dinner together. I have never heard God’s name being called so many times, as in these couple of days in the camps in Greece. God was worshiped there much more than in many cathedrals and megachurches.

Idomeni is a valley of blessings, a place where God shows himself each day, through volunteers who have traveled a long time to bring a few bags of potatoes to the refugees, but also through locals who cook food wherever they can. One Greek local brought his herd of cows to a nearby meadow, so he can give milk to refugees.

The goal of our visit was to see for ourselves what is going on in the field, because we cannot rely on what the media broadcasts. It is usually untrue, or nothing is being said at all.

After that, we went to visit other camps in Greece and, needless to say, the needs in each were great. Famine and filth were everywhere. The biggest needs were food and hygiene. Most people could not afford to buy food every day and feed their children. A lot of children ate plain biscuits daily, but even though that would be something we would probably complain about, there was nothing but gratitude in those children’s eyes.

The camp in Thessaloniki is run by the army. We visited the camp with our friends from the organization A21. The camp was built for 3,000 people. They live in small, prefabricated IKEA houses, and are provided with food by the army. They have toilets and showers, thanks to A21. The camp is located on a former army base, so the living conditions are better here.

The scenes we saw in Greece were horrifying, but these people are not hopeless. Europe might have lost hope, but these people have the chance to meet God. Brothers and sisters, we are those who need to be God’s presence there. The great commission given to us in Matthew’s Gospel is the guiding force and the road we need to take. Make people disciples of Christ and help the least of these. That is our task, and that is our hope. We hold the Bible in one hand and bread in the other. We are servants of Christ.

We cannot allow ourselves to follow Pilate’s example and wash our hands of this situation. On the contrary, we should respond to Jesus’ words: “You feed them,” and answer with faithful and ready hearts.

*Elvis Džafić is volunteer coordinator for refugees for the Baptist Union of Croatia.*
Ministering to Syrian Refugees IN JORDAN

By Hanna Massad

It’s such a blessing to be able to gather 30 Syrian families and around 40 (if not more) individuals in a church building, and share the truth with these broken people. These people are hungry; physically and on other deeper aspects. It’s dear and amazing at the same time to be able to provide food for the physical and the spiritual at the same place and moment.

After sharing a word with the people of this nation we distributed food boxes for each family, something tangible to carry with them as they were going back to their homes with a smile on their faces and on their souls, who were encouraged by what they heard and touched by the volunteers who made it a point to show care and communicate, “you are not alone in this, God sees you.”

At the door, as they were leaving, we wanted to do one more thing that is very important, which is spreading the warmth. We wanted them to take the warmth of our love which they felt that morning with them, to wear it (so to speak) and cover themselves within, deep inside. We were blessed to hand out some hats and scarves for the kids.

After two days from this meeting in the church, we visited three families from those who were at the meeting. Their response was great with the shared message that day.

One of the ladies we visited, Um Qasem, said, “the preaching was great. I go comforted by it. The words entered my heart smoothly. We really need to get rid of the hatred and all the bitterness we carry within.”

Another lady, Owaf, declared, “I haven’t heard something like that before, the words were really sweet. Syrian people have been through a lot. They have bitterness. They need to let go and forgive more as they are harming themselves. We needed to hear such words especially at this time.”

Another Lady, Qaderia said, “I’m so happy that I got to hear this message. It comforts me. I must say that I’ve seen care and experienced love from the Christians and only them. The love that you have, it amazes me.”

Children suffered because of the war and all the violence they have seen back in Syria. That impacted them physically, emotionally, as well as mentally. In the multitude there was a very young boy who got a physical problem because of the bombs he was exposed to in his area back in Syria. We were able to pray with the child, as well as help his family financially.

Hanna Massad, former pastor of Gaza Baptist Church in Palestine and teacher at the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary, ministers to a church of more than 200 Iraqi refugee families in Amman, Jordan.
Baptists in Ecuador and other countries offered emergency relief to those affected by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck the country on April 16. The Baptist World Alliance sent an initial sum of US$15,000.

At least 661 persons were killed, more than 27,700 were injured and several were missing. Three Baptist church buildings were destroyed, about 110 houses belonging to Baptist families were lost and some 79 damaged. Almost 1,000 Baptists were known to have been affected, including 16 pregnant women and more than 420 children.

Life in the South American nation was severely disrupted. More than 280 schools were damaged or destroyed and the beginning of the new school year was pushed back to August from its usual start in May. Tourism, a major income earner for sections of the country, such as Manabi, the province that incurred the greatest impact, experienced a setback due to the damage or destruction of hotels and attractions. Agriculture, another major economic source, suffered due to damaged fields and crops. The government of Ecuador and the humanitarian community estimated that 720,000 people were in need of humanitarian assistance.

“We would be very thankful if the BWA could help us with any kind of economic support to help us meet the great needs,” wrote Parrish Jacome, BWA regional secretary for South America and executive director of the Union of Baptists in Latin America. Jacome lives in Guayaquil, the largest and most populous city in Ecuador. “We have reports of destroyed church buildings and families of the churches that have lost their homes and some of their relatives.”

“The ravages are heartbreaking in 15 to 20 cities and coastal towns,” said Milton Bustos, president of the Baptist Convention of Ecuador. “We are coordinating the work through the Baptist Convention of Ecuador and its 15 regional associations and are gathering aid for the five regional Baptist associations that were affected,” he explained.

Israel Baptist Church in Guayaquil said “we’re getting bottled water, canned food, dry food, powdered milk, tents, basic hygiene products, portable batteries, lamps and kitchen utensils” to earthquake victims. Jacome, the congregation’s pastor, declared the earthquake as “one of the most terrible events to have happened in Ecuador.”

“The Baptist Convention in Ecuador and all the churches have organized to send support and coordinate help coming from abroad,” Jacome said. “We are sending teams to the most affected areas for relief.” Days after the earthquake, he said “the response team is still finding people alive under the wreckage. He told Christian Today that Ecuadorians are “facing a complicated and difficult situation.”

A Rescue 24 team comprising Hungarian and North Carolina Baptists in the United States arrived in the country on April 18. The team included three medical doctors, two paramedics, one first aid specialist, one humanitarian assistant professional and two translators. They worked with Ecuadorian Baptists to assist with search and rescue and to provide medical assistance, sanitation and temporary shelter to those in need. Rescue 24 indicated that the earthquake damaged communications, transport and sewage systems, making it difficult to conduct rescue operations.

At a provincial emergency coordination meeting, Julio Cesar Quinonez, governor of Guayas Province, welcomed and thanked the Rescue 24 team. He issued a letter of request to Rescue 24 for medical and humanitarian assistance and promised all necessary administrative support.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam assured the Ecuadorians of the support of the global Baptist family. “You can be assured of our prayers for all those affected by this difficult situation. We also want to assure you of our desire to express solidarity with you as you seek to respond to the needs that exist,” Callam told Bustos.

“May God grant patience to all those who have to deal with the consequences of the earthquake and strength to those who lead the recovery process. May the inexhaustible grace and mercy of God be made clear to all of you,” Callam said.

“As a Baptist family we express our commitment to help and solidarity in these difficult times. Together we can show God’s love to people who are suffering,” declared Jorge Quintero of Chile, a vice president of the BWA. “May God strengthen the Baptist people of this country and provide them the courage to encourage and comfort the afflicted.”

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**DONATIONS**

may be made online at:  www.bwanet.org/give
or sent to:  Baptist World Aid  
c/o Baptist World Alliance  
405 North Washington Street  
Falls Church, VA 22046 USA
Baptists responded to an intense series of flooding in Texas in the United States. Heavy rains that swept across southeast Texas in April-June deluged the city of Houston and the surrounding region, killing at least eight people and flooding roads, highways, businesses and homes.

The April 2016 rains led to the most widespread flood event in the Houston area since Tropical Storm Allison in 2001, causing a state of emergency to be declared. The heavy rains were the latest in a string of more than a dozen flood events that affected parts of the US states of Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas and Missouri, dating back to March 2015.

According to the Weather Channel website, “the 12-month period from April 2015 to March 2016 ranked as the wettest on record in Oklahoma, and the second wettest on record for Texas, Arkansas and Missouri.” The rains in April-June 2016 made matters worse.

Texas Baptist Disaster Recovery, Texas Baptist Disaster Relief, Texas Baptist Men (TBM) and other agencies mobilized to provide assistance to residents who were flooded out. Baptists focused on areas such as Deweyville on the Texas/Louisiana border, which had not received the attention or levels of assistance Houston did.

Texas Baptist Disaster Recovery focused efforts on assisting members of the Calvary Baptist Church in Deweyville, reporting that “Nearly 80 percent of Calvary Baptist members’ homes sustained flood-damage.” Its initiative, Shalom Builders, which “aims to mobilize trained and equipped construction workers to areas affected by disaster,” was to be deployed in Deweyville.

Texas Baptist Men “established a command post in the Copperfield area of northwest Houston, and volunteer chaplains offered prayer and spiritual support to flood victims.” TBM teams did relief work in the Memorial and Katy area of Houston and provided “guidance to local churches already in the community helping their neighbors.” Volunteers partnered with the Salvation Army to prepare meals at the Orange County Emergency Operations Center for operation personnel, Texas Task Force members and survivors in the shelter. The agency recruited and mobilized church groups to assist in daylong or half-day cleanup projects in the Houston area.

200 YEARS of the American Bible Society

The American Bible Society (ABS) celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2016. During its long history various Christian traditions, including Baptist, have been involved in the organization, and it has had a profound impact on the United States and other countries.

ABS, founded in 1816, was the successor to a number of earlier initiatives to make the Christian Bible available to Americans. This included the first complete re-translation of the Bible by an American, Charles Thomson, printed in Philadelphia in 1808 and the founding of the Philadelphia Bible Society, the first Bible society in the US, in the same year. By 1830, 300,000 scripture copies were being produced yearly.

Baptists were, from the outset, pioneer members of ABS. Due to disagreements over translations, the American Bible Union was formed in 1850 by Baptist members of ABS. A major area of dispute was the translation of the Greek word baptism. Baptists preferred the translation, “immerse,” whereas the word was transliterated “baptize” in most other English translations, including those produced by ABS.

Due to heavy debt in the late 19th century, the Bible union was dissolved and its assets and projects taken over by the American Baptist Publication Society, which was established in 1853.

Baptists, however, continued to be involved in the work and ministry of ABS. In a resolution originally passed in 1923 by the Northern Baptist Convention, now American Baptist Churches, USA, it was “resolved, that in view of the valuable support being rendered by the American Bible Society to Baptist churches and missions throughout the world, especially the generous gift of Bibles and scripture resources to new churches, the American Baptist Churches, USA, commends the Society to the moral and financial support of all our churches.” This resolution was reaffirmed in 1986 and modified in 1999.

Southern Baptists have given support to ABS. In a 1973 resolution the Southern Baptist Convention “urges all Southern (Continued on next page)
FLINT, MICHIGAN, USA:
Baptists Provide Water to Ease Crisis

Baptists were among religious groups that responded to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, in the United States.

The crisis began in April 2014 after Flint switched its water supply from Lake Huron (via Detroit, Michigan) to the Flint River. The drinking water had a series of problems that culminated with lead contamination, creating public health risks.

The Flint River has had a long history of being polluted and the pipes laden with lead, which is toxic, especially to young children.

President Barack Obama declared a federal emergency in Flint and ordered federal aid for the city.

An emergency manager had made the changes in water supply. Beginning in 2011, the governor of Michigan appointed Baptist churches and their members worthily to support the American Bible Society with generous financial contributions in order to provide the needed Scriptures to carry on our worldwide missions program.

There have been several noted American Bible translators who were Baptist. Among the most well known was Adoniram Judson, who made the first complete translation of the Bible from the original languages into Burmese, which he completed in 1834.

Robert Bratcher, who died in July 2010 at age 90, was the New Testament translator for the Good News Bible. Born in Brazil to Southern Baptist missionaries from the US, Bratcher had worked with ABS in revising a Brazilian Bible. First issued in 1966, the Good News Bible was aimed at those who spoke English as a second language. The complete Good News Bible, also known as Today’s English Version, was published in 1976. It was, for a time, the best selling Bible in the US.

The Baptist World Alliance has worked closely with both ABS and United Bible Societies (UBS), the global umbrella fellowship of 145 individual Bible societies that has ABS as a member and major supporter. In 1989, the BWA presented a US$100,000 check to ABS at the BWA General Council to open a drive to provide one million Bibles and New Testaments to people of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. One year earlier, in 1988, the BWA provided 100,000 Russian-language Bibles to Baptists in the Soviet Union through UBS.

The BWA collaborated with the Mennonite World Conference and UBS to provide the first braille translation of the New Testament into Russian. Archie Goldie, Baptist World Aid director at the time, told of the utter joy on a blind Russian woman’s face when she read the translation of St. Matthew’s gospel in braille in Moscow. “Now I can read the Bible for myself,” she declared, as she soaked in the significance of the experience.

Over the years, ABS has transformed the means by which the Bible has been produced and transmitted. While printing Bibles continues to be important, digital delivery has taken on new prominence. ABS collaborated with several Bible societies to launch a website that allows persons across the world to receive the Bible on their mobile devices; hosted the Digital Word Summit that culminated in the launching of Every Tribe Every Nation; introduced the Bible Minded app as a way to encourage the memorization of Scripture; and signed a contract with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), to manage the new .BIBLE top-level Internet domain.

As part of the bicentenary, ABS hosted the UBS World Assembly in the city of Philadelphia from May 12-18. The World Assembly occurs every six or seven years.

The meetings in Philadelphia attracted leaders from some 140 Bible societies working in more than 200 countries and territories. Approximately 500 Christian leaders attended.

The week’s events were launched with a gala celebrating the 200 years of ABS ministry and looked ahead to the future of the organization. Among the issues discussed during the World Assembly were the future of Bible translation, publishing, distribution, engagement and ministry.
a series of emergency managers, stripping Flint’s mayor and City Council of power. These emergency managers had absolute authority over Flint’s finances and political decisions.

Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention helped coordinate responses from churches in other parts of the US, a number of which partnered with First Trinity Missionary Baptist Church of Flint to deliver bottled water and other supplies.

Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, raised $50,000 to purchase water, hand wipes and baby wipes. Six teams were deployed from mid-March through April to deliver the supplies, with the purchases made in Flint to help support the local economy. In addition to distributing water to Flint residents who drove to First Trinity to receive cases of bottled water, Alfred Street volunteers visited apartment complexes to deliver water directly to residents.

“In total, Alfred Street has sent six teams and about 50 members to provide support of water and supplies in Flint,” Capitol Media USA reported. “At the end of the six-week initiative, more than 15,000 cases of water and countless other supplies had been organized and donated to Flint city residents.”

Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, deployed teams in the first two weeks in March, who distributed water. St. Smyrna Baptist Church in Newnan in the state of Georgia, sent a total of nine tractor trailer loads of water, which totaled about 9,600 cases and 200,000 bottles of water.

Volunteers were moved by the experience. “Some said they were at their wit’s end,” Marcia Norfleet, director of mission at Alfred Street Baptist Church, told the Alexandria Gazette. Norfleet, who led the first team from her church, stated, “one [woman] said her husband had dangerously high levels of lead and was sick from the water. He was over 70 years old.”

“This is beyond tragic,” said Dustin Sullivan, youth pastor at Alfred Street, who led the second team. “It’s criminal, unfathomable and blatant. This isn’t accidental. This is intentional,” he told the Gazette.

“I went inside of homes and saw first hand how much water was needed for certain tasks,” said Tamarkus Cook, pastor of St. Smyrna Baptist Church. “For example, six bottles of water for breakfast. Two gallons of water to wash clothes. Many people are only able to bathe once a week. When we took the water, it was almost as if it was living water,” The Newnan Times-Herald reported.

Aside from serving individuals and families in the community, First Trinity was a hub for other churches in the area to receive water that they then distributed to their own congregations.

American Baptist Churches, USA, through American Baptist Home Mission Societies’ (ABHMS) Disaster Relief Office, collaborated with American Baptist Churches of Michigan and Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Flint to coordinate relief efforts in the city. Mount Olive provided Flint residents with bottled water and hosted a Family Fun Fair in partnership with the Michigan Health Department and the YMCA.

Russell Kirksey, deacon and donations coordinator at Mount Olive, said churches were being asked to do more “as some of the resources in place now are withdrawn.”

“While there are certainly justice and advocacy dimensions to the crisis in Flint, ABHMS is pleased to make this first installment on behalf of American Baptists in responding to the immediate human need for clean water,” said Jeffrey Haggray, ABHMS executive director, after the initial grant was sent to the city. “We urge our American Baptist family to continue your generosity, which makes such gifts possible.”

In addition to being contaminated, the water supplied after the change over was expensive. Ezra Tillman, pastor of First Trinity Missionary Baptist Church, reported “he knew something was very wrong with the water system months ago when his church’s annex was getting bills for $400 to $500 for an average of eight days of water use a month,” according to the People’s World website. “It’s very pricey and taxing to our community and members because we have a high percentage of retirees and seniors on a set income,” Tillman said. “It’s like you’re a prisoner to the situation: You pay your bills, but you don’t get your water . . . It’s awful.”

Flint, one of the poorest cities in the US, was charging an average of $910 a year for household water, nearly three times the national average.

The ministry of First Trinity and Mount Olive and the assistance of other churches and religious organizations filled a void. Even though the US National Guard distributed water to Flint residents, “the National Guard requires would-be water recipients to show photo IDs and limits families to a pack of water per day,” People’s World reported. The churches placed no such restrictions on water distribution.
On Sunday, March 13, 2016, six Baptist groups gathered under the umbrella of the Gospel Baptists Association of Trinidad and Tobago (GBATT) to celebrate 200 years of Baptist presence and witness on the twin island state of Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad Baptists, with approximately 10,000 members in some 100 churches, trace their history back to 1816 with the arrival of a group of former enslaved persons who were Marines and soldiers who fought on the side of the British during the American War of 1812-1814.

Featured Speaker at the Grand Thanksgiving Service was Victor Anthony “Ken” Cadette, former president and general secretary of the Baptist Union of Trinidad and Tobago (BUTT), past president of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF) and a former member of various committees and commissions of the Baptist World Alliance.

Cadette both inspired and informed the packed auditorium by comparing the journey of the former slaves who had become soldiers and saints to the biblical journey of the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt. Just as the Israelites were set free and “crossed the Red Sea” to the Promised Land, so too the Baptists had been set free and “crossed the Caribbean Sea” to their promised land. He exhorted the large Baptist gathering that, just as the early pioneers brought their faith and planted churches, so too should present day Baptists be faithful in spreading the Gospel wherever they are.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, in sending greetings, celebrated “all that God has enabled among the Baptists of Trinidad
Face page, top: A handbell choir performs during the 200th anniversary celebration of Baptists in Trinidad.

Right: Keynote speaker Ken Cadette challenges the large turnout at the 200th anniversary celebration of Baptists in Trinidad.

and Tobago over the past 200 years" and saluted "the memory of the many through whom God has spread the glorious Gospel" in the Caribbean twin island republic.

“We remember the women and men who settled in south Trinidad, brought their faith with them, and commenced Baptist witness in this island,” Callam declared. “We also celebrate the work that was undertaken in [the capital] Port of Spain starting in 1843 and the support given it in the early years.”

In encouraging historians to write the history of Baptists for posterity, Callam pointedly recalled the names of notable Baptists from the Caribbean nation, which lies just off the South American mainland. These include Edward Confor, George Cowen, Will Hamilton, Robert Andrews, Albert Mitchell, David Richardson, Jim Thompson, John Law, Nelton Richardson, Norris Ryan, Beryl Saunders, John Bramble and John Philbert.

He noted the role that Cadette and another Trinidadian, Wendy Ryan, former BWA director of Communications, played in the life of the BWA. Anslem Warrick, BUTT general secretary, a GBATT director and chair of the Bicentennial Celebrations Committee, is a BWA vice president.

CBF Vice President Bernadette Richards-Duncan challenged the Trinidadians to keep the momentum alive by making the event an annual one. David Kerrigan, general director of the British mission agency, BMS World Mission, sent greetings celebrating the long relations shared between British and Trinidad Baptists and rejoiced in God’s faithfulness.

The event took place at Sundar Popo Buparlal Hall of the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts in San Fernando and included a mix of positive messages in song, dance, poetry and spoken word.

The Bicentennial Celebrations continue with a Gala Dinner on June 18 and a National Church Growth Leadership Conference and book launch on September 17.

Trinidad Baptists trace their history back to the arrival of a group of former enslaved persons who were Marines and soldiers who fought on the side of the British during the American War of 1812-1814.

Far left: A dance group performs during the 200th anniversary celebration of Baptists in Trinidad.

Center left: A section of the audience at the 200th anniversary celebration.

Left: Caribbean Baptist Fellowship Vice President Bernadette Richards-Duncan brings greetings to Trinidad Baptists.
Noel Vose, president of the Baptist World Alliance between 1985 and 1990, died on May 2, in Western Australia. He was 94 years old.

Vose was founding principal of the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia, which opened in 1963, and retired from that position in 1991. The institution was renamed in his honor in 2008, and is now known as Vose Seminary.

The Australian Baptist leader paved the way for the founding of the seminary when he moved a motion at the Western Australia Baptist Assembly in 1957 that the assembly recognize the urgent need for a state theological college, and that concrete plans be presented to the 1958 gathering for establishing one.

He was president of the Baptist Union of Australia from 1975-1978 and a former pastor at East Fremantle, Dalkeith and Parkerville Baptist churches.

In addition to being president, Vose held several other positions in the BWA, including as a member of the General Council and the Executive Committee, and chair of the Division on Study and Research Executive Committee and of the Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation. He also was a member of the Commission on Baptist Heritage and Identity, the Commission on Baptists against Racism and the Church Health and Effectiveness Workgroup.

As chair of the Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation, he led the BWA in the round of theological dialogue with the Mennonite World Conference from 1989-1992, resuming conversations that had ceased amicably between Baptists and Anabaptists more than 350 years earlier, in about the year 1630.

“On behalf of the Baptist World Alliance, we receive with sadness the news of the passing away of God’s servant, one of our past presidents, Dr. Noel Vose,” said BWA President Paul Msiza.

“Our hearts and prayers are with his family. As a Baptist family we were indeed blessed by God to have such a great leader with a pastoral heart. Dr. Vose has served his Lord and Master with much dedication and love. The Baptist family has been enriched by his selfless ministry.”

Msiza declared that “we are comforted to know that even though we will miss him, Dr. Vose entered the eternal rest to be with the Lord. He has joined the great cloud of witnesses in heaven.”

“Noel Vose was an outstanding servant leader within the worldwide Baptist family and beyond,” General Secretary Neville Callam said. “We celebrate his thoughtfulness, insightfulness and charitable spirit.”

Callam made reference to one of Vose’s publications. “One of his outstanding literary gifts to us is Mena: Daughter of Obedience, which was published in 2013. It reflects Vose’s capacity to discern the vast and diverse confessional canvas on which the grace of God is displayed and it also offers a story of the triumph of the love of Christ.”

The general secretary declared that “Noel is now gathered with the vast cloud of witnesses to receive the prize that awaits those whom God calls to glory. The loss of Noel Vose will be felt around the world but his legacy will be celebrated in every meeting place of thoughtful Christians who knew him.”

Vose earned degrees and diplomas from the University of Western Australia, the Baptist Theological College of New South Wales, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago in the United States, and the University of Iowa, also in the US.

He was predeceased by his wife, Heather, who died unexpectedly in 1990.

He is survived by son, Stephen, a member of the BWA Commission on Interfaith Relations and the Promotion and Development Advisory Committee; and daughter, Valerie.

Memorial service took place at Parkerville Baptist Church in Western Australia on May 12.

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**BOOK NOTES**

**IN MEMORIAM**

**NOEL VOSE**


The Story of HOPE

My recent visit to a refugee center in Berlin, Germany, reminded me of my childhood. As a child I used to travel with my late mom to visit my grandmother in a very rural area called Winterveldt. This was during the dark days of apartheid in South Africa. During those years, areas zoned for native South Africans were not developed at all. Such areas used to be under the Department of Bantu Administration and Development. The government did not provide those areas with electricity, water and basic facilities like schools and clinics. The local communities had to put up school buildings and clinics and the administration only provided the salaries for staff and other resources needed in those institutions. This place, where my late grandparents owned a small farm, was one of the most underdeveloped areas. There were no paved roads or streetlights and only a few boreholes. The only means of public transport was by bus. Most people had to walk more than a kilometer from bus stops to their homes. The distance from my grandparents' home to the bus stop was almost two kilometers. The worst part was that only a few busses were allocated to these areas per day.

There were days when we were on the last bus to Winterveldt and that meant arriving at night. We had to walk in the dark for more than a kilometer on an uneven, dusty path. I still have flashbacks to when I would walk with my mom in the dark and you could not even see your hand. It was very scary for a little child. The only thing I did was hold on to my mom's hand as we walked slowly in the dark. It would be quiet after the last bus left and the only sound were our footsteps as we shuffled on the path. The other sound was of dogs barking or jackals howling. But once we arrived at my grandparents' home I forgot all about the long bus trip and the long walk in the dark. The excitement to meet my granny, my aunts, my uncles and my cousins would bring so much joy and happiness. I would know that we were home and safe. The moment of intense fear of walking in the darkness and not seeing where you were going and hearing sounds of jackals howling were gone.

This was what I witnessed at the refugee center I visited. The administrator took us around to show us the place. There was a special place she saved for the end of our tour and this was the children's place. We saw little boys and girls playing with toys and running around; it looked so normal. One of the volunteer social workers, Esther Dichristin, a member of the Baptist union in Germany, shared with me about her experience at the center. She served when the center had just opened to refugees. Her first day was traumatic because of the conditions of both adults and children. The people who arrived were hungry, dirty and looked ill. The children were traumatized and scared. They grabbed anything they could find. Caregivers had to keep their valuables in safe places.

When we visited the center their fear of a long walk and travel from country to country was over. This was a temporary home but things were normal. The children had found their joy and happiness again. They realized they did not need to grab and fight over everything. They had more toys than they needed. There was enough food for everyone. Their long walk in darkness had finally come to an end. The long days and nights without food, water and shelter were now over. These children did not understand why they had to experience such trauma and suffering. What was important to them was that the pain came to an end. They will begin a new life in their new country.

God has given human beings something wonderful: the ability to move on from a painful past. Children, especially, forgive quickly and move on with their lives. When God asks us to forgive it is because God has given us the ability to forgive. Many people have suffered greatly in this world and many have chosen God's way of dealing with the painful past by forgiving and grabbing the new life with both hands and moving on.

That refugee center was a home of hope, especially for those little boys and girls. This is what God wants us to do, to give hope to people in this world where there is so much pain and suffering. We are the agents of hope in this world.

Col 1:27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Paul Msiza
from the President

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