Commissions of the Freedom and Justice Division

The **Commission on Religious Freedom** resources BWA member bodies in their advocacy for the protection of fundamental human rights for people of all faiths, especially Baptists and other Christians who experience or are threatened by persecution. It provides information on issues of religious freedom affecting Baptists and religious minorities around the world; prepares reports and research papers that can support the work of advocacy for freedom of religion and belief; provides theological tools to assist reflection on important issues and strategies related to religious freedom – issues such as development, peace, and human rights. It also deals with religious freedom for people of no faith, multicultural understandings of church and state relations, etc.

The **Commission on Peace and Reconciliation** explores how the BWA and its member bodies may contribute to reconciliation and peace. It monitors situations of conflict and provides assistance where Baptists are victims of violence or oppression. The Commission raises awareness of human rights abuses in the context of violent conflicts and war; and mediates, where appropriate, when Baptists are involved in conflict, either with each other or with others. The Commission networks and collaborates with others who are also committed to working for peace and reconciliation. It identifies resources to assist BWA member bodies in the ministries of peace, conflict transformation, and reconciliation. It also helps Baptists around the world reflect theologically on what it means to seek justice and to be part of Christ’s ministry of reconciliation.

The **Commission on Human Rights Advocacy** identifies Baptist individuals, churches, and other institutions that are maintaining, in the name of Christ, outstanding witness in the defense of human rights, and encourages and facilitates networking among them. It seeks creative ways of sharing their stories with the BWA family and offers biblical and theological reflection on human rights advocacy. It resources Baptists for advocacy at the local, national, and international levels and seeks to integrate all the different levels of advocacy, connecting the work the BWA does at the international level (particularly through the UN) with the advocacy done by BWA member bodies and church related organizations and individuals at the local and national levels.

The **Commission on Social and Economic Justice** engages in research and discussion on situations marked by injustice. It suggests ways in which the BWA member bodies may bring the values of faith to bear upon the situations identified. The Commission supports the churches’ efforts to speak on behalf of the poor and to advocate for an economic structure that prevents lasting poverty. It resources BWA member bodies with materials for corporate
worship and personal spiritual practices and offers guidelines for exploring experiments in economic justice in communities both within and outside of the church. The Commission provides information on issues of economic justice, offering a theological framework to foster the principles of social and economic justice by Baptist congregations and their leaders. The concerns of this Commission include radical disparity in the distribution of wealth, economic exploitation, forced migration, unemployment, corruption, structural sin and oppression, globalization, trade and investment, job and low-wage workers, just and lasting change, building a more equitable economic system, freedom and welfare, social security, labor trafficking, and chronic poverty.

The **Commission on Creation Care** provides biblical and theological reflection on how Christians may live responsibly in the world, relating to the whole of life as part of God’s continuous work of creation, sustenance, and redemption. It deals with issues such as stewardship of the creation, environmental justice, and sustainable development. The Commission provides Baptists worldwide with resources for corporate worship, personal spiritual practices, and exploration of experiments in environmental justice and sustainable development. It provides information on issues of environmental degradation and its consequences for future generations, offering a theological framework to advance the principles of creation care and environmental justice by Baptists.

The **Commission on Racial and Gender Justice** has its origin in awareness of the fact that all human beings are created with equal dignity as members of the human race and as children of the same God. In spite of this, human sinfulness has fuelled collective pride which is prejudicial and disrespectful of the differences and diversity which enrich humans as part of God’s creation. The Commission notes that this sinful expression of pride is generally manifested through a sentiment of superiority on the part of particular human individuals and groups in relation to others. It recognizes that racism, ethnic prejudice, and sexism are social illnesses which prevent millions in the world from living a fulfilling and free life. The Commission acknowledges that sexism remains a force commanding structural, psychological, and physical violence, especially against girls and women in general. In line with the work of the BWA Special Commission “Baptists against Racism,” the Commission seeks to raise awareness about the sinfulness of racism and sexism. It provides biblical and theological reflection designed to assist churches and individuals in identifying and confronting all forms of racism and sexism in the church and beyond. The Commission challenges Baptists to remain committed to work for racial and gender justice and ethnic reconciliation. It promotes forms of relationships and structures that encourage respect for equality and justice in light of God’s overall goal for humanity and the fullness of its flourishing. It investigates the extent to which racism and sexism connect with
other forms of injustice and oppression and encourages and supports efforts to eliminate injustice based on racial and gender factors.

The Commission on Interfaith Relations provides space for shared reflection on interfaith relations in order to develop mutual respect and to promote security, peace, and the common welfare of Baptists and their neighbors of other religions. It seeks to increase mutual understanding and encourage dialogue between people of different religious communities on the basis of the biblical command of love of God and love of neighbor. It investigates how Baptist Christians may live out their faith in contexts where they live in close proximity to people of other faiths. The Commission probes the Baptist heritage to discern how it informs those living in such contexts and promotes appropriate collaboration between Baptist and their neighbors of other faiths, especially in the defense of justice and human rights, while faithfully bearing witness to the love of God. It suggests ways to face religious fundamentalism and extremism and to diffuse violence that has its origin in religious fanaticism. It analyzes the relationship between the mandate to evangelize and to live in peace with others.