Brazilian Youth
Committed to World Mission
FAUSTO AGUIAR DE VASCONCELOS, senior pastor of the First Baptist Church, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has been invited by the Baptist World Alliance to be the new director of Evangelism and Education and Study and Research for the next five years 2005–2010, succeeding Tony Cupit of Australia who retired in July.


Vasconcelos is well known in the life of the BWA as he chaired the Executive Committee of Evangelism and Education. Since 1995 he has also served as a voting delegate from Brazil to the General Council.

Vasconcelos brings to this new appointment a wealth of experience in Baptist life at the local church as well as the national and continental levels. He is the immediate past President of the Brazilian Baptist Convention, a position he has held eight times. On the regional level, he has also served a four-year term as President of the Union of Baptists in Latin America that comprises Baptist conventions and organizations in eighteen countries.

Vasconcelos was ordained in 1973 at First Baptist Church of Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro and was senior pastor there until he moved in October 1985 to the First Baptist Church, Rio de Janeiro. He succeeded Joao Soren, who was President of the BWA between 1960 and 1965.

A 1972 graduate of South Brazil Baptist Theological Seminary in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Vasconcelos has a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Robert Ricker, former Executive Secretary of the Baptist General Conference and Chair of the BWA Personnel Committee, emphasizes his deep commitment to Christ and to the church, and describes him as “very articulate” with multi-lingual skills, gracious, and a statesman. “I also like the fact that he is thoroughly evangelical and this is one of the great virtues of the Latin America church today.”

Vasconcelos is married to Dione Pereira de Vasconcelos and the father of two daughters, Diane (married to Andre) and Denise (married to Mario).
5 Brazilian Baptists Committed to Mission
The amazing story of Brazilian Baptist churches: active and growing, with vision and excitement in their commitment to mission.

8 Making a Difference: Living Water Conferences
Living Water Conferences emphasizing evangelism and leadership, are planned for strategic locations around the globe!

10 Growth & Unity Among Baptists
The family of Baptists continues to grow. Here’s an update on BWA membership worldwide.

11 Jamaican Baptists: Renewed Boldness
‘Boldness in Mission’ was the theme for this year’s assembly – a fitting theme for a growing Baptist union with a fiery past.

13 Asian Baptist Theologians Meet in Bangkok
Challenging papers on intriguing topics were presented at a recent symposium in Thailand focused on the theme ‘The Church in Asian Society.’

15 News from Around the World
Reports of inspiration, challenge, tragedy and praise from our diverse Baptist family.

22 Liberia: Hope at Last
Democratic elections bring hope to a country long torn by conflict. It is hoped that the new president’s Christian convictions will lead her into bringing new peace to her people.
Earlier in the year, Janet and I spent a week in Dallas, Waco and Houston as the guests of Texas Baptists and we are grateful to Charles and Rosemary Wade for arranging a wonderful program of ministry opportunities and generous hospitality.

Among the many highlights of my visit was being granted honorary membership of the Texas Fellowship of Cowboy Churches and to make my membership authentic I was taken to the Houston Rodeo! The Cowboy Church movement in Texas is a wonderful story of a mission enterprise which was born in a spiritual concern to evangelize one of the cultures that is not being reached by traditional churches. To date there are over fifty cowboy churches with twelve more in the pipeline and as a permanent reminder of this fruitful ministry, I was presented with a belt buckle which bears the image of a cowboy kneeling at the foot of the cross.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGTC) is one of the newest member bodies of the BWA with a membership of 2.3 million members in 5,640 congregations. I was privileged to preach in three churches – 1st Baptist Church Plano, 1st Baptist Church Arlington and South Main Baptist Church Houston. I visited Baylor University, the largest Baptist University in the world with 14,000 students, and I preached at the weekly chapel service at the Truett Seminary. It was also a privilege to address the members of the newly elected BGTC Board and share something of my personal vision for the future of the Baptist World Alliance. Everywhere we travelled in Texas the recurring message was ‘please tell the rest of the global Baptist family that Texas Baptists love them and are praying for them’.

The climax of my preaching engagements in Texas was an inspirational visit to the Dallas Baptist University (DBU), where the President of the University, Dr Gary Cook, introduced me to Mamoru Ishida, a young Japanese Christian on the staff at DBU. He serves as the co-ordinator for the International Student services. Mamoru was brought up in a Buddhist home in Japan. As a teenager he decided he wanted to study in the United States and made enquires about Texas Christian University. His parents thought a Christian University was unsuitable for a Buddhist so Mamoru suggested another Texas based academic institution he had seen on the web, Dallas Baptist University. Because Mamoru’s parents had never heard the term ‘Baptist’, and thought it was someone’s surname, they said yes—not knowing DBU is an institution with a profound Christian commitment. Members of the faculty and student body witnessed to Mamoru through their everyday living on the campus and over the months he saw the life of Jesus shining out in the lives of human beings. One day in a chapel service at DBU the congregation was singing the worship song, ‘As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you’. Mamoru told me he began to cry as the song was being sung because he realised the words were describing his own situation. He was like the thirsty deer searching to quench a spiritual thirst, and the Lord used the words of a worship song and the witness of Christian friends to lead Mamoru to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ the Living Water.

Mamoru is a typical new resident of the state of Texas where it is estimated that around 120 languages are spoken among the population of 21 million. Texas Baptists have congregations in 46 different languages and they know they must start at least 74 new language churches in order to give every resident of Texas an opportunity to hear the good news in their own language. During the last ten years the population of Texas has grown by about 4 million people and is projected to grow at a similar rate for the next decade.

It is estimated that sometime after the year 2015, 50% of the population of Texas will be Hispanic, and the Baptists are aware they are currently reaching only 1% of Hispanic peoples. Since Hispanics represent the future of Texas, the BGTC have accepted this major challenge of ministering to Hispanic peoples.

Let me conclude with another reference to the cowboy churches. In an editorial in their official newspaper ‘Cowboy Times’, it is suggested that the number one attraction of the cowboy churches is non judgmentalism. Cowboys often see Christians as being judgmental, but in the cowboy churches they discover they can relate to the gospel message. The good news is given by people who look like them, and talk like them, and understand the things they value in life. The mission philosophy of the Cowboy church is to make it comfortable to the lost cowboy so that he will sit there long enough to hear and understand the Gospel, and then under the influence of the Holy Spirit to make a response to the good news.

I believe this is called the Jesus way of doing evangelism.

FROM THE PRESIDENT
David Coffey
TERESINA, BRAZIL: Teresina is in the Western part of Northeast Brazil, near the equator. The temperature of 105 degrees Fahrenheit or more was typical for the convention center where the Brazilian Baptist Convention met from January 20–25, 2006. Brazilian Baptists elected a young Baptist pastor from Curitiba, Brazil, as their new president. The pastor of First Baptist Church, Curitiba, Paschoal Piragine, was elected on a second round vote after the first round eliminated 12 other candidates. It is a sign of a younger and impatient generation of Baptists in Brazil who desire to move into the 21st century with hope and change! Brazilian Baptists are passionate about mission, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ as only Savior!

Teresina is off the beaten track, but almost 1600 delegates came. There are 80 Baptist churches in this city of 800,000. The president for the past year has been Fausto Vasconcelos. This was Vasconcelos’ last assembly as president of the Brazilian Baptists. He is revered as a peacemaker and outstanding preacher. This was his eighth time to serve as president. The convention, in a very moving ceremony, presented Vasconcelos and his wife, Dione, with a plaque honoring their many years of service to the convention. The thousands of people attending the evening service stood as the leaders with outstretched hands offered a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing to the Vasconcelos’ as they leave Brazil and move to Washington, DC, where Fausto will take over as BWA Director of Evangelism and Education and Study and

(Continued next page)
Research. It was very obvious that Fausto and Dione Vasconcelos were much beloved leaders of Baptists in Brazil. Brazil’s loss becomes a gain for the BWA and Baptists of the world!

**Brazilian Baptists Strong**

The good news from the Baptist Convention of Brazil is that they continue to grow and witness in a remarkable way. The latest statistics indicate that their membership has grown to 1,009,100 in 6,729 churches and 3,504 missions. Brazilian Baptists continue to grow. Thousands attend their colleges and seminaries. New churches are being founded daily. The youth are anxious to witness to Christ. There are hundreds of foreign missionaries overseas. Local churches continue to evangelize and do mission work locally and globally. In one city where two million marched through the streets to honor local religious saints, Baptists set up a tent with doctors and dentists and medical care for all those who needed it. Free bottled water was handed out. As a result of this “giving a cup of cold water in my name,” more than 3,500 confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. I spoke to one young lady and asked how she became a Christian. She gave her testimony that there were always the intermediaries of Mary and the saints before she came to God. She never knew Christ to be alive and present in her life until she gave her heart to Christ one Sunday morning at the local Baptist church! Now she is in charge of the home church movement of her local church. Her sister came to Christ through her witness and her three brothers are now attending a Baptist church. It is this witness within the family that has brought growth to Brazil!

The amazing story of the Brazilian Baptist Convention is the work of their Foreign Mission Board. With hundreds of missionaries, they work in more than 60 countries. A very exciting new development is the Radical Project. One hundred of the best and brightest of Brazilian Baptist young people are chosen for a three year term of intensive missionary work in difficult places. Mission’s night was an unbelievable story of grace, suffering and miracles. An anonymous woman missionary from the Sudan, in an emotional and deeply spiritual testimony, spoke for more than 30 minutes on her mission work among Muslims in the Sudan. With great pathos she told of how difficult it was to be a teacher when her young students had not eaten in the past two days. The children are so hungry that they even steal watermelon out of the mouths of goats. The young woman would go home and in despair find it difficult to eat when others were starving. Her testimony was reminiscent of 19th century pioneer missionaries who gave up family and home and nation to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Waldemir Tymchek, executive director of the Brazilian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, has brought vision and excitement to the Brazilian Baptists’ commitment to mission. The story of Brazilian foreign missions is typical of the paradigm shift that is occurring in world missions from the North to South. No longer
is missions determined by white missionaries. Brazil leads the way in showing an integrated mission policy of committed young men and women for Christ. From Iraq to the Ukraine, from Sudan to Angola, from Albania to Bolivia, Baptist missionaries from Brazil are there. Thank God for the new generation of missionaries from the Two-thirds world!

On the home front in Brazil, many churches are moving out and witnessing. Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven materials are used widely and have brought fresh encounters with Christ to thousands. Each year 2,000 pastors gather to participate in a Purpose Driven workshop and conference.

Financial problems have plagued several of the boards of Brazilian Baptists for a number of years. Previously their Sunday School Board had gone bankrupt and now the Home Mission Board is one million dollars in the red. The executive secretary of the Home Mission Board was voted out of office. The same financial problems are also affecting a number of the other 33 schools and colleges that are part of the Brazilian Convention. Much of this has to do with the economy, but it has not affected the local churches which continue to flourish and grow.

It was a joy for me to bring a Bible Study and also greetings from the Baptist World Alliance. With joy we remembered the great congress of 1960 when 200,000 gathered for the final assembly and message by Billy Graham. Thank God for Brazilian Baptists who have provided leadership to the BWA over the years!

(Note: There is a second Baptist convention in Brazil, the National Baptist Convention of Brazil, which also continues to grow with more than 200,000 members. They have one church in Beal Horizonte with 30,000 members. This convention was the result of a split about 30 years ago, but we rejoice that there is now good cooperation between the two!)
The second and third Living Water Conferences will be held April 20–23 and October 8–13, 2006, at Curitiba, Brazil, and Nairobi, Kenya, respectively. This follows on the first conference held in St. Petersburg, Russia, in October of 2005.

‘Jesus Christ: Living Water’ is the strategy approved by the BWA General Council as a quinquennial emphasis for 2005–2010 with three major elements. Firstly, the Director of Evangelism and Education, Fausto Aguiar de Vasconcelos, has the responsibility to work with the BWA member bodies to enhance the evangelism ministry of Baptists throughout the world. Secondly, Tony Cupit, Coordinator of Living Water is to conduct international Living Water conferences or similar events on leadership and evangelism in each of the BWA regions, with approximately two per year. And thirdly, General Secretary Denton Lotz is to urge BWA member bodies to set goals for evangelism, to embark on a ministry of prayer and to celebrate Pentecost Sunday as a special evangelistic effort.

Due to efforts by Lotz and Living Water liaison Ian Chapman, who is special assistant to the General Secretary, generous gifts of more than $1.2 million were received to ensure that adequate funds were available to make the ‘Jesus Christ: Living Water’ strategy and the conferences viable and effective. A major part of the disbursement of the funds will be to conduct the international conferences on evangelism and leadership and to enable suitable leaders and younger people, generally unable to attend such international conferences, to play a part in them.

A Living Water Advisory Committee has been appointed comprised of persons who will bring credibility and guidance to this BWA strategy. As well, a Living Water Core Committee, which will meet three times annually and have programmatic and budgetary responsibility for the overall strategy has been appointed. Its composition includes leaders from various BWA regions. Divisional responsibility lies with the Division of Evangelism and Education. Planning and preparation for conferences in the regions is being done in close consultation with the Executive Committees and Secretary of the regional bodies. Every effort is being made to seek to glorify God through these events, to ‘make a difference’ in terms of the work of the Kingdom to inspire our people to be more intentionally evangelistic and to identify those who can bring ‘servant leadership’ to their people.

The Brazilian conference will have participation from other countries in the Latin and Central American regions and is a joint effort between the BWA and the Union of Baptists in Latin America with cooperation.
from the Parana State convention and the First Baptist Church, Curitiba.

Emphasis will be on leadership and evangelism and presenters and preachers will be representative of the whole of South America. Some workshop topics, most requested by UBLA leaders in consultation with the Living Water Coordinator, will include, planting new churches throughout Latin America, transforming the congregation, the relation between evangelism and social ministry, and the role of women in church planting and evangelism.

There will also be focus on models of pastoral leadership, the leadership example of Jesus, conflict resolution in leadership, as well as witnessing to political and business leaders.

The Kenya conference is expected to have approximately 250 participants. There will be a great rally in the Parklands Baptist Church in Nairobi on the final night so that local Baptists can share in the inspiration of the Living Water events and become more aware of the work of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship.

Major papers will be given with the topics, ‘Integrity in Christian leadership’, ‘The marks of the leader’, ‘The Church’s response to HIV/Aids and other health issues’, ‘Telling people about Jesus’ and ‘Spirituality and discipleship’. Preachers being invited include BWA President David Coffey, Terry Rae from South Africa, and Steve Asante of Ghana.

There will be a celebration of the Lord’s Supper with the ministry of foot washing. Like in other Living Water conferences there will be special music and early morning combined devotions in a place for worship and reflection. The subjects to be handled in the workshops will include some handled elsewhere but will include some especially requested for the African context like, ‘Joys and trials of partnership in mission’, ‘Planting and sustaining churches in Africa’, ‘The unique ministries of the French speaking churches’ and ‘Doing ministry with limited resources.’

Other Living Water Conferences are planned for Chiang Mai, Thailand April 30 to May 2, 2007 and Nagaland, India in December 2007.

‘Jesus Christ: Living Water’

a strategy with three major elements:

1. Director of Evangelism and Education, Fausto Aguiar de Vasconcelos, works with BWA member bodies to enhance the evangelism ministry of Baptists throughout the world.

2. Coordinator Tony Cupit conducts international Living Water conferences on leadership and evangelism in each BWA region.

3. General Secretary Denton Lotz urges BWA members to set goals for evangelism, to embark on a ministry of prayer, and to celebrate Pentecost Sunday as a special evangelistic effort.
The Family of Baptists continues to grow. With conventions and unions applying for membership in such groups as the European Baptist Federation, the North American Baptist Fellowship, as well as the Baptist World Alliance, Baptists continue to draw closer together in unity.

The Evangelical Free Church of Sweden (known as Interact) with 330 churches and more than thirty thousand members has joined the EBF; as well as the Association of Baptist Churches in Kosovo, a group of three small Albanian-speaking fellowships that have been established in the province since the conflict there in 1990. These two conventions are in addition to the Baptist Church in Baghdad, Iraq. All three member bodies are being recommended for membership within the BWA.

In North America, the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Baptist General Convention of Texas were accepted as members both within the NABF and the BWA (July 2005). In the meantime, both the Baptist General Convention of Missouri and the Southern Baptist Japanese Baptist Churches of North America have applied for NABF membership, the former also to be recommended for membership within the BWA.

And old wounds are being healed. Two rival and competing conventions in Chile have reconciled after 30 years of division. They will remain separate conventions but have decided to work closely with each other and have held joint worship services and meetings. Similar developments have taken place in Costa Rica and El Salvador.

Mission work in other areas, such as in Asia continues to grow strongly. In Cambodia, where there were no Baptist churches up to ten years ago, there are now 250 churches, and missionary zeal continues to spread with over one thousand cross cultural missionaries in India alone.

In the midst of the celebration of growth and unity, there is sadness that Baptists in Kazakhstan have voted to disfellowship themselves from the family of world Baptists through their withdrawal of membership from the BWA and the EBF. General Secretary Denton Lotz and EBF Regional Secretary Tony Peck tried to reach an understanding with the Baptist convention in Kazakhstan during a visit earlier this year. Although they have withdrawn membership, the Kazhaks have stated that they “are ready to return to the dialogue on returning to the BWA and EBF.”

The Baptist World Alliance has a membership of 213 conventions and unions and more than thirty six million members.
JAMAICAN BAPTISTS demand (and defend) their independence. It is intricately woven into the historical fabric that led to Baptist deacons and members being hanged, pastors placed on trial, and their churches and manses torched.

Most noteworthy, and at the forefront of it all, is the story of Samuel Sharpe. “I would rather die on yonder gallows than to live in slavery,” he declared at his execution in May 1832. This followed upon what has been termed the ‘Sam Sharpe Rebellion’, the ‘Christmas Rebellion’, or the ‘Baptist War’, depending upon the preferences (or bias) of the historian.

Sharpe was an educated slave who served as a Baptist deacon and lay preacher who famously led a work stoppage and strike in December 1831 that turned riotous and bloody. The impasse, which engulfed half of Jamaica, was drawn out for six months until it was ‘settled’ with the execution of five hundred slaves in May the following year. In the interim, scores of churches and Baptist houses were torched by Jamaican whites who arrested and hounded Baptist pastors, blaming them for the cataclysm. Pastors such as the famous emancipator, William Knibb, were taken hostage by their own members who hid them in caves and secluded areas when some of these pastors wanted to confront the marauding authorities themselves.

While historians claim that Sharpe’s rebellion hastened the end of slavery in 1838, Baptist fervency was not yet contained. Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, the latter a wealthy politician with a white father and black mother, were hanged for their alleged leadership of the

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Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865. Both Baptist deacons were outraged at the conditions of Jamaican blacks nearly thirty years after slavery’s end. Bogle, having sought direct petition with the Jamaica Governor without success (having traveled almost one hundred miles on foot), led a rebellion that had had long lasting ripple effects until today.

Such fierce independence of spirit and desire for freedom was birthed in the founding of the Baptist church in Jamaica. George Liele, after having been freed by his master during the American War for Independence, took refuge in Jamaica when, after the war’s end, the son of his previous owner tried to re-enslave him. That trip from Savannah, Georgia in the United States to Jamaica was fateful as Liele inspired a church and movement that became a source of discontentedness against slavery and oppression.

It was in this context of Jamaican Baptist fervor—both historic and current day—that Denton Lotz, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance stood on February 26, 2006. It is ironic that Lotz stood facing a sea of Baptists the day following the election of a new person who would replace the retiring Jamaican Prime Minister and Baptist, Percival Noel James Patterson who served as Jamaica’s longest serving head of government since 1992. And the irony was enhanced when the newly elected leader, Portia Simpson-Miller, claimed Baptist roots, having been dedicated as an infant in a Baptist church and being raised in its Sunday school. She, providentially, was asked by the Prime Minister weeks before to represent him on the morning of February 26 during the largest of the week of meetings.

Lotz brought the message of the world to the ten thousand strong congregation in the teeming National Arena in Kingston, Jamaica’s capital. The culmination of the most important week on the Jamaica Baptist Union calendar, the General Assembly, held the last week February of each year, had Lotz speaking with eloquence to a crowd that knows and understands Baptist history but is worried about Baptist identity and their place in Jamaican society.

It was perceptive of Lotz to tell the throng that “Baptists in Jamaica need to remember the past but not live in the past,” and that Jamaican and world Baptists need to draw on the power of the cross, the power of prayer, and the power of the resurrection, for “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of self-control.”

Having been spoiled by the greatness of the past, Jamaican Baptists worry that their preeminence as the ‘go-to’ church has been superseded, suggested by the once-mighty denomination now being only the third largest church organization in the country, a membership count that seems to stagnate, and what is seen as non-appeal to youth.

The anxiety is partly responsible for a refocusing on mission, and perhaps a reflexive Baptist response to assert and stand out in a country that desperately needs to hear prophetic voices. Baptist tempers have been cooled, since the twentieth century, by acceptance. Sharpe, Gordon and Bogle are three of Jamaica’s seven National Heroes, the highest honor that the country bestows on any single individual. The church gifted the country with two Prime Ministers, Patterson, and before him, Hugh Lawson Shearer. And Baptists are at every level of national life in business, the professions, and government.

‘Boldness in mission’ was the theme for this year’s assembly which ran from February 23 to 26, and indeed, Jamaican Baptists are raring at the bits, if not already at a gallop. Despite its internal moaning, the denomination has been growing at a tear, at least in the founding of new churches. Fourteen new churches have been planted since 2001, five in the last two years, a phenomenal growth when compared to the previous forty years. And, four years ago, it planned a national mission conference in Ocho Rios, the north coast tourism mecca and came out with the Ocho Rios Declaration. Among other things, the declaration calls for the establishment of a mission fund that shall go toward expanding the mission work of the denomination. The church body also renewed its mission commitment by sending missioners to Panama and Turks and Caicos.

The JBU changed its tack from in the past when it relied solely on local congregations to identify and execute church planting opportunities. With local churches and pastors apathetic toward church planting, the Jamaica Baptist Union Mission Agency took the lead by not only identifying opportunities for church planting, but by actively acquiring property for these new churches. Now local churches are following the lead and are engaged in church planting mission at a fast clip.

Outgoing President Johnathan Hemmings echoed the mood and ferment within the Baptist camp when he called for Christians, especially Baptists, to be bold in hitting out against injustice and in reaching the lost and suffering, and cautioned Christians and church leaders not to allow their egos, ambitions and personal interests to get in the way of evangelism.

The Jamaica Baptist Union now boasts 315 churches with forty thousand members.
“The Church in Asian Society” was the topic of a recent symposium sponsored by the Asian Baptist Federation and the Asian Baptist Theological Seminary (ABGTS). Papers were presented by notable Asian theologians: Joseph Kuo-Tsai Tan, Sergio A. Rojo, Jr., Takatemjen Ao, Lizette F. Knight, Stephen Tam, Rachel Tan, and Johnson Lim. Their papers covered a range of interesting and intriguing topics.

Dr. Joseph Tan, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Taiwan, addressed the subject, “We and they: theological reflection on the relationship between Church and the local community’. He emphasized the unfortunate situation of insularity in many local churches in Asian society that results in churches that are introverted and where a false dichotomy exists between “we” and “they”. Tan concludes:

Becoming like Christ is to change ourselves. Whenever we try to preserve what we are already, and are unwilling to change ourselves for the sake of love, we are becoming alienated from Christ, because he does not hold onto what he is (Phil. 2:6–7). When we become like the people of the local community in order to show Christ’s love to them, we become like Christ for them. When we become the incarnated Christ for them, we will become different than before. This means giving up ourselves more and more, so that we will become more and more like Christ for them till the whole community is turned back to Christ.

Dr. Rojo, Jr. spoke on the subject of leadership, using a portrayal of six Filipino Baptist leaders to demonstrate how Filipino leaders could model the example of Jesus in becoming transformational leaders. His research on transformational leaders concludes that “God, in his countenance, is using the Baptist confessional line in appropriating and propagating the biblical heritage of the transformational leadership of Jesus Christ.”

The principal of Clark Theological Seminary in Nagaland, Dr. Takatemjen Ao, presented a paper on ‘Witness in Luke-Acts: A Paradigm for Learning and Growing Together’. He challenged Asian Baptists to learn and grow together as a community of ‘salt and light’. “First,” he said, “the challenge is to maintain and preserve” the gospel of Christ. “Secondly, we are to be a witness to the living Christ! How are we to maintain, preserve ourselves and witness to a dying world? Can we learn and

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grow together as a community of ‘salt and light’ in Asia today?” Looking at the concept of witness in Luke and Acts, he concludes that it is necessary in Christian witness for the whole church of Christ to be involved a holistic ministry. He asks, “In our task of theologizing and in our teaching can we ignore the many people who continue to be spiritually poor, and those who are exploited, deprived and dehumanized?” Dr. Ao called on all Asian Baptists to be involved in theological education just as the early Jerusalem community (as a community of ‘theologians’) were involved with the people in a kind of theological education by extension . . . . It was that mass movement of a ‘theological community’ that made it possible to make a breakthrough in reaching out to the whole world.

Women theologians presented some of the most incisive papers at the symposium. Dr. Lizette Knight’s paper on ‘Maximum learning through balanced critical thinking and creative teaching’ illustrated the different ways people learn. The professor of Christian Education at the Baptist seminary in Bagio City, Philippines, showed that a good teacher is able to use various methods to reach all students, drawing on knowledge as to how the brain works. This knowledge provides a unique opportunity to re-examine the training methods that will bring true understanding, empathy, tolerance and respect for all learners.

Dr. Rachel Tan, Associate Dean of ABGTS in Biblical Studies and Professor at the Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary, gave a provocative and enlightening paper on ‘Pauline perspective and cultural implications for female preachers in Asian Churches’. Tan stated that, though a feminine, she was not a feminist. Her concern was not with the question of ordination, but more particularly with Pauline instructions concerning women and preaching. Her paper focused on the “biased biblical interpretation” that results in the church rejecting female leaders. As an example of this bias Tan told the story of a mother who was theologically trained but not allowed to pray publicly, but whose five year old boy could do so because he was a male! Tan concludes that “Gender bias is the main culprit in hindering women who are gifted, willing, and committed from exercising their God-given talents, fulfilling God’s call in their life and ministry, and putting into practice the training they received from Bible schools and seminaries.” In referring to 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, 14:34–35, and 1 Timothy 2:9–15, she stated:

The three Pauline passages discussed in this paper reveal that Paul is not prohibiting women to preach simply because they are women. The cultural situation and specific circumstances in the Corinthian and Ephesian churches made it necessary for Paul to instruct the women to remain silent or to ask their questions at home. His main concern was to maintain orderly worship and not allow those women to distract others or even run the risk of being misinterpreted as seducing men. He also provided them with a long-range solution by demanding that women, who are mostly uneducated, be given opportunities to learn so that they would not be misled by the false teachers and would also become qualified teachers later on.

Other papers were presented by Dr. Stephen Tam, Administrative Dean of the ABGTS and Associate Professor of Religious Education at the Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, who gave a critical paper entitled, ‘Facilitate Chinese women seminarians to learn’; Geoff Pound, former principal of Whitley College in Melbourne, Australia who led the delegates in a discussion of ‘Pastoral leadership in Baptist theology and practice’; and Dr. Johnson Lim from Singapore who raised the significant question for many Baptist churches, ‘Is preaching in the Church still relevant today?’

The Asian Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary has more than 250 students engaged in post graduate studies. It has its own accrediting system, but its doctoral degree is equivalent to those offered in North America. With changing times in Asia, and the Pacific Rim becoming the world’s economic powerhouse, Asian Baptist seminaries aim to train young men and women to be effective in ministry.

With changing times in Asia, and the Pacific Rim becoming the world’s economic powerhouse, Asian Baptist seminaries aim to train young men and women to be effective in ministry.
Religious Conflicts

Demonstrations against caricatures of the prophet Mohammed have led to violence in Nigeria. Ibos in the eastern part of the country, who are mostly Christians, have been attacked and killed and buildings have been burned. Retaliation has led to persons from northern Nigeria being attacked, with both Christians and Muslims suffering. The government is trying to prevent the violence from spreading to the southern part of the country. A peace committee has been formed that is chaired by a prominent Baptist in the country.

Church Planting

There are five hundred institutes with four thousand students who are being trained for church planting throughout Latin America. The vision is to increase the number of Baptist churches in the region from a little over twelve thousand to fifty thousand by 2015.

Burmese Refugees

Approximately one hundred and fifty thousand Burmese refugees continue to be housed at the border near Thailand, having fled repression in their country more than a decade ago. The Maela camp, populated mainly by the Karen people, consists of forty thousand persons. There are forty Baptist churches and a Baptist Bible school with 250 students, making the Baptist Church the largest Christian body ministering to the refugees. There are a total of nine refugee camps in the region.

Asian Congress

The Seventh Asian Baptist Congress is scheduled for May 2–7, 2007 in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. The four Baptist conventions in that country are joining hands as hosts. Special workshops will be held for pastors, mission leaders, theological educators and other groups. The last congress was held April 2002, in Manila in the Philippines.

Somalia

Lott Carey Reaching Out

Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, a premier African American global missions and relief agency, is continuing to help provide humanitarian assistance and relief for survivors of the December 2004 tsunami in the East African country of Somalia.

The African Tsunami Relief program provided specific assistance to 321 families as well as 264 individuals in Bandar Bayla, Somalia. Lott Carey not only provided food and necessities for these people, but also purchased and distributed fishing equipment. The mission purchased 11 boats, 200 lobster traps, 15 glass fiber shark fishing launches/outboard motors, 30 shark nets, 50 plastic nets, 27 lobster gears, 15 boat anchors and 60 net marker buoys for fishermen in the region.

Lott Carey is also preparing to fund a boat and motor repair shop to train young men for employment and ensure self-sustainability of the fishing industry. The mission has spent more than $30,000 to help restore the fishing industry in the Bandar Bayla district of Somalia.

Somalia

Anniversary Celebration

Amidst conflict, hostility and uncertainty, the Baptist Union of Lebanon celebrated its 50th anniversary toward the end of 2005. The Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in that country has become a centre of theological education for much of the Arab world and Lebanon itself has experienced church planting and growth.
After eighteen years as General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, and after twenty six years of full time employment with the worldwide body, Denton Lotz has given notice of his retirement. He made the announcement during the Executive Committee meeting of the BWA on March 8 in Falls Church, Virginia.

But Lotz will not be leaving his post right away. The Personnel Committee, one of the standing committees of the BWA, will begin the process of identifying someone to succeed Lotz, who has seen the BWA grow and mature during the period he has served as Chief Executive Officer. Succession dates will be announced at the General Council meeting set for Mexico City in July of this year.

During his time at the BWA, Lotz has presided over an organization that has grown in stature and mission with focus on human rights and freedom, relief and development through Baptist World Aid, as well as mission and evangelism. Among his notable achievements was the ability to garner substantial funding, more than $1.2 million, for the current Living Water program that includes a series of conferences to assist conventions, unions and regions to expand missionary work as well as to train leaders. Lotz has been the voice and the face internationally in addressing issues of human rights violations and, in particular, persecution of Christians. He was also instrumental in acquiring the new headquarters building for the BWA, and will be leaving the organization in a healthy financial position.

A first rate diplomat, Lotz has being able to balance the differing and sometimes competing interests of the 213 Baptist conventions and unions from around the world that make up the BWA, many of whom hold conservative and moderate positions on a whole range of theological and social issues.

Lotz told the meeting that he came to the decision to retire after much prayer and reflection, consultations with his closest family and friends, and what he considers the need for a new General Secretary to be part of the process of the Implementation

March 8, 2006
Falls Church, Virginia, USA

It is with great freedom and a certain sense of emotion that I announce that I have requested the Personnel Committee to begin the process whereby they will nominate the next General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

Some may ask if you were elected in England for another five years why this request to the Personnel Committee? Friends and members of the committee have told me that it would be much easier for the committee if they could know of my intentions earlier rather than later so that they could begin to have a search process put into place at which time I could then announce a specific date. We hope this will be possible by the time the General Council meets in Mexico City this July!

There are several reasons why we felt it proper to be re-elected at the congress in England this past summer:

1. The Centenary Congress was a time for unity and healing. Celebrating one hundred years was a momentous occasion in the life of the BWA. We had been through rough waters but the Lord had calmed the seas. In fact the Centenary Congress was so successful, Baptist identity so affirmed, unity so strongly realized that making this decision was made easier for me!

2. We wanted not only to retire at a time of unity, but also to leave responsibly at a time when the financial viability of the BWA institution was secure.

I am pleased to report that beyond our wildest dreams the Lord has in a wonderful way made this possible.

3. With the retirement of Tony Cupit and Wendy Ryan a great vacuum of leadership, history and substance was evident. If I had retired at the congress the vacuum of leadership would have brought difficulty for the beginning of the new BWA century. It was important for me to do the right thing at the right time. The congress was not the right time, but now is the right time! We are pleased that Ron Harris, Beth Wright, Eron Henry and Fausto Vasconcelos, as new members of the Executive Staff, are on a quick learning curve and assuming their responsibilities with enthusiasm and professionalism.

4. I promised our new BWA president, David Coffey that I would assist him in this transitional period. The high energy experienced at this BWA Executive Committee has been a blessing and an obvious sign that we are on the right path in this new BWA century! Our new BWA president, David Coffey, is a capable person who has brought an evangelical renewal and important structural changes to British Baptists. I have full confidence in the new BWA leadership!

On January 18th of this year I turned 67. It was a time for reflection and prayer. I asked myself, “How does one decide God’s will for one’s life?” Our answer was the same as we had given many times to our children and other youth: 1.) Read the Bible, 2.) Pray, and seek God’s guidance, and 3.) Seek the counsel of family and wise spiritual friends.

My family has been supportive of me during the past 26 years I have served the BWA, and previously during the 12 years I served as a missionary in Eastern Europe. One son said, “You have been a great father but we never saw much of you. We want our children to have a grandfather that they know!” Another told me, “Do you remember Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 7th
century? No one knew what he did for the first 65 years of his life, but the last 20 brought reformation and renewal to the church. Your next 20 years could be the best!"

Since my wife and I married in 1970 I have been traveling. I thank God for her love, patience and loyal endurance during these many years of travel and separation. She has been the strength and love that has held our family together. Now is the time for us to begin a new phase of our life together!

Again, let me emphasize that I believe the BWA is now at a high point in its life. Although some may leave us the fact is the Baptist World Alliance more than ever is God’s instrument for uniting Baptists worldwide. There are more than 20 Baptist bodies seeking membership in the BWA. Representing a community of more than 100 million believers the BWA is the largest Protestant Christian World Communion in the world. It is an awesome responsibility to lead such an organization. The prayers of God’s people have kept us more united than ever, more committed to world evangelization than ever, and more committed to the ministry of compassion.

I was pleased several years ago to have appointed a think tank to consider the future of the BWA. Furthermore, during these past five years we have been grateful for the 21st Century Committee which has made outstanding recommendations to renew our common life together. Last year in this very Executive Committee an Implementation Task Force was appointed to follow through on recommendations. We had no idea at that time last year that the task force would make such fast progress. The General Council will be changed to more effectively meet the needs and concerns of those who attend. Recommendations for positive structural changes will enhance the representation and strengthen the BWA. Because of such positive and fast progress it seems only proper that the next general secretary be involved in helping to formulate those changes.

Having prayed, studied scriptures and consulted with friends, more than ever Janice and I feel that this is the right time to pass on the mantle of leadership to that man or woman whom God has chosen to lead us into the future. Let me assure you that we make this decision under no pressure and in complete freedom. We feel very much the Lord leading us in our life. We do not know what future ministry awaits us, but for sure we will continue to use every opportunity to preach the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

It has been an honor to serve Baptists worldwide. Every president has been a friend and has brought special gifts to our worldwide fellowship. The Lord has blessed the BWA with an excellent servant leadership-type staff. Janice and I will pray about the timing of our retirement and in Mexico City this July, the Lord willing, will announce the date we feel most appropriate. But until that time let me assure you that we shall continue to serve the BWA with enthusiasm and prayer for the mighty things God is doing through our brothers and sisters worldwide!

Task Force that is engaged in the process of renewal within the organization.

Previous to being General Secretary, Lotz was director of Evangelism and Education from 1980 to 1988 and succeeded Gerhard Claas after his untimely death.

Lotz continues as General Secretary until a successor is identified.

The BWA has been privileged to experience the immensely gifted service of Denton Lotz for the past 26 years and it is difficult for us to imagine the BWA without him. He has been a missionary theologian, an inspiring preacher and evangelist, a champion for religious liberty, a Baptist ambassador, a Christian statesman, and a brother unrivalled in his prodigious remembering of the names of hundreds of people and places. Listing these gifts and abilities is a reminder why we are so heavy hearted to hear the news of his impending retirement. But it is the mark of a great leader to know when it is right to step down and Denton has listened to his Lord and taken counsel from his family and friends, and he knows this moment is God’s timing for him and the BWA family. In all his gifted service he has been supported ably and loyally by his wife Janice, and it is now the task of the BWA family to pledge their prayerful support to the Lotz family as they explore the next step of following the Lord who has plans to prosper them in a new future with Him.

I have every confidence in the members of the Personnel Committee under the experienced leadership of Dr John Sundquist. It will be their task to propose a process to the BWA Council meeting in Mexico City in July 2006, which will lead us to the appointment of the next General Secretary of the BWA. I encourage the BWA family worldwide to begin immediately to pray for the discerning process and seek the wisdom of God for these important decisions on the future leadership of the BWA.

David Coffey
President of the Baptist World Alliance
March 2006
It was a coming together of minds and hearts, but mostly of hearts. While reports were presented from regions, departments, commissions and divisions, the focus was the relationships that Baptists share with each other.

This was the mood and tone of the Executive Committee meeting of the Baptist World Alliance that began with meetings between the executive staff and the regional secretaries and included the Window on the World Banquet, individual group meetings, followed by the meeting of the large group of executive members. Persons from every continent attended and participated. The sessions were held March 2 to 8 at the headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia.

There were only two sad moments: the report of the regrettable withdrawal of the Kazakhstan Baptist Convention from the BWA and the European Baptist Fellowship, and the announcement by longtime General Secretary, Denton Lotz, that he will be retiring. President David Coffey said of Lotz’s announcement that it causes “heaviness of heart,” but it “takes a really good leader” to know when it’s time to make such a change.

In his report to the Executive Committee, President Coffey reiterated the need for more ‘focused advocacy’ on the part of Baptists. There should also be a focus on emerging leaders. This comes out of the realization, according to Coffey, who is also the General Secretary for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, that “more persons are coming into leadership at a younger age” in a number of conventions and unions. “There is the need to equip young and emerging leaders.”

Dr. Lotz, in echoing Coffey’s call for Baptists to “resurrect the doctrine of the church,” spoke about the need for Baptists to be mindful of and relate to other church bodies. He reported that theological ‘conversations’ have been held with the Anglicans and Lutherans and that the Vatican has asked for dialogue. There is no compromising of Baptist principles, doctrines or positions, he affirmed, but as members of Christ’s body who need to co-exist, these ‘conversations’ are important. In some countries, such as in Nigeria and India, religious groups have engaged in talks with each other. These prove to be helpful in situations of conflicts, ethnic, religious, or otherwise.

The Executive Committee reflected on the Centenary Congress in Birmingham, England in July of 2005, and looked forward to the next congress scheduled for Hawaii, July 28 to August 1, 2010. The Birmingham meetings saw more than twelve thousand delegates assisted by over five hundred volunteers. The committee hopes that the congress of 2010 will honor Jesus Christ; that it will transform the lives of those who attend; that it will be relevant to issues persons and churches are facing; and that there will be the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work. Every attempt will be made to ensure that the congress have a ‘Hawaiian flavor’ while having a family atmosphere and a commitment to excellence.

In preparation for the Hawaii congress, the Executive Committee will have its meeting there in March 2007.
The Doubletree Hotel in Falls Church, Virginia, hosted a ‘solemn celebration’ as Baptists, mainly from local area but including others from across the US and overseas, gathered to listen to new president David Coffey speak on the ‘Challenges for the BWA in the new century’ at the Window on the World Banquet on March 4.

Coffey bemoans that, based on the behavior of some Baptists, the largest protestant denomination in the world is more known for what it is against than what it is for. In the face of challenges in the present and on the horizon, Baptists should instead focus more on what the church and believers stand for. These, according to Coffey, include a commitment to unity where he quoted St. Paul, “Strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and a maxim, “Unity in essentials, liberty in nonessentials, charity in all things.”

Coffey also commends Baptist historical commitment to mission and evangelism in a world where there are four hundred million persons who “live where there is no witnessing church.” Hence, “mission and evangelism is an unfinished task.” But such mission and evangelism must include a commitment to “make poverty history” in meeting dire human needs, as well as being “friends of the earth” by caring for God’s creation.

Among church groups, Baptists have been in the vanguard in striving for religious liberty and human rights, whether it is in Burma, China, or Eritrea. “We need to be the voice of the voiceless,” Coffey told the more than three hundred guests at the annual Window on the World Banquet. The persecution of Christians in particular and other groups is a bane that Baptists should attend to.

At the annual celebration, South Korean Ambassador to the United States, Lee Tae-sik, a friend and guest of immediate past BWA president Billy Kim, shared a testimony of his own conversion and life of faith. Having served previously as ambassador to the United Kingdom and as a junior minister in Korea, he thanked Baptists for helping to make Korea a ‘Christian country’.

A happy occasion during the evening was greetings from the President of Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile and BWA Vice President, Raquel Contreras. She told of the coming together of the two rival Chilean Baptist unions (the other being the Convention of Baptist Churches of the Chilean Mission) that had endured a split since the 1930s. Both groups have repented and forgiven each other for the split and are engaged in cooperation.

Ron Harris, Director of Advancement for the BWA, while thanking guests for their support in the past, urged them to double their commitment. Harris recounted the problem of HIV/AIDS in such areas as Sub-Saharan Africa, where pastors bury an AIDS victim every week. In a moving appeal, he asked the pastors and congregants present to imagine: “Every week, week in and week out, 52 weeks a year, burying another AIDS victim.” He pointed to “child prostitution, enslavement of women, believers’ persecution” as growing needs that require attention of the Baptist World Alliance. “The BWA is at the forefront of that battle,” he said.

Paul Montacute, Director of Baptist World Aid, recounted the work of the relief and development arm of the BWA over the past year in hunger and famine relief in India, Palestine, Tanzania and Malawi; flood and hurricane relief in Chechnya, Serbia, El Salvador and Guatemala; and refugee assistance in the Sudan, among others. But Montacute, in expressing how grave and deep the needs are, stated, “It is the large disasters that hit the headlines, but a disaster to just one person is equally devastating.”

The Window on the World Banquet is an annual celebration put on by the Baptist World Alliance that runs concurrently with its annual executive meetings.
‘The Gathering’ – that is what the next General Council and all future council meetings will be called. The change in name captures the new dynamics that are at work within the Baptist World Alliance.

Spearheading these changes is the Implementation Task Force (ITF), formed at the Birmingham Congress in 2005. The ITF is mandated to implement recommendations made by the 21st Century Committee that was formed to take a wide look at and recommend broad changes to the BWA.

Chairman of the ITF, Keith Jones, hopes that the changes will give the BWA a clearer identity and the conventions and unions a sense of being part of one family. The aim is to, “move from a formal structure to something organic, being a place where Baptists share concerns, share mission, and protect one another.”

The ITF is focused around ‘five clusters of commitment’: worship and fellowship, a nurturing of mission and evangelism, defense of human rights and freedom, response through relief and sustainable community development and the promotion of relevant theological reflection.

The thrust begins at what is commonly known as the General Council, held in July of each year, and scheduled this year for Mexico City, July 3–8. But it is not expected to end there.

Implementation Task Force chairman Keith Jones addresses the Executive Committee

During the current quinquennium which runs until 2010, it is hoped that the new understanding and new paradigm will be embraced by staff at BWA headquarters in Virginia, through the committees, commissions and work groups, and to the continental regions. In this and all future Gatherings, what was previously the General Council meetings will now be held over a shorter period of time, with one ‘Decision Meeting’ that is to last only three and one half hours that will take in the ‘business’ of the BWA.

The program for the Gathering reflects the changes. Most of the meetings, spread over several days, will focus on forums and affinity groups. These forums, rather than having ‘expert’ presentations, will welcome participation from anyone who wishes to do so to share views, ideas and experiences. Selected topics include HIV/AIDS ministry, violence against women and children, conflict resolution and the local church, Christian presence and witness amongst Muslims, and interreligious dialogue.

Affinity groups will draw persons with similar interests or similar backgrounds to share in different sessions. Pastors, youth (under-35’s), theological students, and women in leadership are some of the groups. Others are public educators, staff of conventions and unions, and Christian professionals. But there will be time for various committees and groups to have individual sessions. The Baptist Heritage and Identity, Christian Ethics, Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation, Freedom and Justice and Baptist Worship and Spirituality study commissions will meet in addition to the BWAID Executive, Membership committee, and others.

The Gathering will involve members, associates, and friends within the worldwide family of Baptists.

**Mexico**

**“The Gathering”**

**In Memoriam**

**Those who passed on . . .**

**Akiko Matsumura**

Akiko Matsumura, former President of Asia Baptist Women’s Union and former Vice President of BWA, passed away on Friday, November 25, 2005, in Tokyo, Japan. She was 88 years old. She studied at the WMU Training School in Louisville, Kentucky, in the 1950s.

On returning to Japan, she served as the newly established Youth and Women’s Director of the Japan Baptist Convention. In 1970, she and her husband were on the organizing committee for the BWA Congress in Tokyo. She was hospitalized at Seishikai Baptist Hospital in Tokyo for the past 18 years. On the morning of November 25, she was quietly called to be with the Lord. Her funeral service was held on Monday, November 28, 2005, at Hasune Baptist Church in Tokyo, Japan.

**Kerstin Ruden**

Kerstin Ruden of Stockholm, Sweden, who served as the President of the BWA Women’s Department between 1980 and 1985, passed away December 26, 2005, at age 91. She was one of the women who first met in London in 1948 to form the European Baptist Women’s Union (EBWU) and initiated the first Women’s Day of Prayer. She served the EBWU in several capacities, including as President. She was the wife of Erik Ruden who served as the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Sweden for many years and one-term General Secretary for the European Baptist Federation. Her funeral service was held on January 3 in Kungsholms Baptist Church where she was a member.

**Policarpo Pérez Leyva**

Policarpo Pérez Leyva, founder and elder of the Baptist Church in Jobabo, Cuba, and father-in-law of Elmer Lavastida, pastor, Second Baptist Church, Santiago de Cuba, was called to meet the Master on Saturday, January 7, in perfect peace and serenity. He was 105 years and four months old. His mind was clear until...
the last minute. Early that day he sang his favorite song, “How Great Thou Art” and then in the hospital, with failing heart and breath, he tried to sing, “Onward Christian Soldiers”.

**Foy Valentine**

Pioneer Baptist ethicist Foy Valentine died suddenly on January 7 of an apparent heart attack. He was 82. A native Texan and Dallas resident, Valentine was executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention’s former Christian Life Commission in Nashville from 1960 to 1987. A memorial service was held Wednesday January 11 at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas after a private burial in his hometown of Edgewood, Texas, in Van Zandt County. Valentine is survived by his wife of 58 years, three daughters – Jean, Carol and Susan – and five grandchildren.

**Dr. Wenzao Han**

Dr. Wenzao Han, 83, passed away in Nanjing, China on February 3, 2006. Dr. Han served as President of China Christian Council from 1996 to 2002. From 1985 to 2003, he served with the Amity Foundation as General Secretary, Executive Vice President and Vice President. He also served as Vice Chairperson of the Jiangsu Provincial Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference for more than ten years. Since 2001, after his retirement, Dr. Han served as Chair of the Advisory Committee of the Protestant Churches in China. Wenzao Han attended the BWA Congress in Los Angeles in 1985, the first time the BWA had representation at a Congress from the Peoples Republic of China. He was a friend who encouraged Baptist relations with the church in China. He is survived by his wife and his two sons and three grandchildren.

**Dr. Piero Bensi**

BWA mourns the death of Dr. Piero Bensi, former president of the European Baptist Federation, and author, pastor, teacher and international leader.

The former president and general-secretary of the Italian Baptist Union, Bensi died at age 82 in Florence on February 4 following a long illness. Holder of a doctorate in theology, Bensi was recognized far beyond the confines of his own church. From 1976 to 1982 he served as president of the Protestant Federation of Churches in Italy (FCEI). He was president of the European Baptist Federation (EBF) between 1985 and 1987. Many Italians knew him from his commentaries on national radio as part of a church broadcast every Sunday. In his comments he would give a Protestant slant on current developments in church and society. At different points in his ministry, he was pastor of Baptist congregations in Civitavecchia, Cagliari and Florence; chief editor of the Baptist magazine “Il Testimonio”; and instructor at the Baptist theological seminary in Turin. He was also respected by many Catholics.

Catholic congregations frequently called upon him to lecture regarding the Protestant perspective on social and religious matters. In 1999 State President Giuliano Amati awarded him the rarely-granted medal “Cavaliere of the Great Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic”.

**William A. Jones**

The Rev. William A. Jones, 71, a powerful preacher, a civil rights activist and the pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., for more than four decades, died February 5 at his home in Brooklyn. He had complications from a kidney ailment.

A former president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and founder of the National Black Pastors’ Conference, Dr. Jones served as a member of the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance. He preached at conferences and churches internationally and was the keynote speaker at the Baptist World Congress in Toronto, 1980. Survivors include his wife, Natalie Barkley Brown Jones, their four children and eight grandchildren.

**Phil Strickland**

Phil Strickland, who served nearly 25 years as director of the Christian Life Commission for the Baptist General Convention of Texas (USA) died on February 11 at the age of 64. He was a member of the Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas where he had served as a deacon, Sunday school teacher and chair of various committees. The gospel was his preoccupation and he spent his life making sure it penetrated not only human hearts but human systems as well. He believed that the spiritual and social spheres of life were always interconnected. Strickland was also a long-time valued and faithful member of the Baptist World Aid Committee and the Commission on Christian Ethics. He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

**Wes Forsline**

Wes Forsline, a long-time member of the BWA died on February 20, at age 77. He is survived by his devoted wife, Gwen, three children, Heidi Dahlin, Tami (Marc Hayford) and Ladd (Berni), and three grandchildren. He pastored churches in Duluth and Minneapolis and was executive minister of American Baptist Churches of Minnesota and North Dakota from 1966 to 1970. His two passions were the grace of God and religious freedom. He was an advocate for women’s issues and the disfranchised.
LIBERIA is a country in constant transition, not all of the positive kind. In the midst of this, the Christian church has played a pivotal role, for good or ill. Charles Taylor, the former president accused of committing horrendous atrocities, regards himself as a good Christian affiliated with the Baptist faith. And there was a time when the lines between the church hierarchy and government leadership were blurred that distinctions were difficult to define. This is the reason why, more than twenty years ago, the Baptist Convention of Liberia approved a rule that prohibits its president and general secretary from holding a cabinet or other leading government positions. It was an attempt to recapture the prophetic voice of the church that became muted due to the genetic linkages between church and government.

It is not all doom and gloom. Liberians are fatigued by constant and sustained conflict. The country is ready, indeed impatient for peace and stability; one reason, among others, why grandmother and economist, Ellen Johnson Serleaf is now the first woman head of state in Africa. She comes into power at a time when the people are hungry for leadership that eschews corruption and selfishness and greed and self aggrandizement. They desperately hope that her grandmotherly charm, experience at the international level with the United Nations and World Bank, at the regional level with the African Development Bank, and nationally as a former minister of finance, will lead the country into a stable, if not immediately prosperous future.

At least, this is the hope of Emmett Dunn, a director of the Baptist World Alliance, an observer in the elections last October and the runoff in November between Johnson Serleaf and George Weah, (both front runners from a cluttered field of twenty two candidates), a member of the transitional team in the formation of the new government, and importantly, a Liberian.

Dunn, who left the cozy offices of the BWA in Northern Virginia to spend more than a month in the country, is hopeful, prayerfully hopeful. This is why, other than the fact that he is inextricably tied in heart to his homeland, he observed and participated and served. It is why he served for four weeks as a member of the transitional team that assisted in the formation of the new government, and played a key role as a protocol officer at the inauguration of President Johnson Serleaf. Dunn walked side by side with heads of state and dignitaries from other countries as they came in droves to give support and offer recognition to one of Africa’s newest leaders, one elected through the democratic process. The presence of Laura Bush, First Lady and Condeleeza Rice, Secretary of State of the United States, were a significant nod of approval, Dunn believes.

The support and help of the Baptist World Alliance is not lost on Dunn, or on Liberia’s Baptists. When other countries and entities abandoned Liberia, the BWA stuck it through. Its staff visited the country occasionally during the difficult days. Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, provided more than $2 million worth of books, medication, and other aid. These and other forms of support given to the Liberian people over the years were recognized when the Alliance was invited to be an election observer in the October 2005 elections. Dunn, who is the Director of the Youth Department with additional responsibility for Congress planning, BWA General Secretary, Denton Lotz, African Regional Secretary Frank Adams, Liberian Baptist Convention General Secretary Emile Sam Peale, along with Olu Menjay, principal of Ricks Institute in Liberia, formed the team of observers.

There is hope that Johnson Serleaf will, at minimum, change the culture of a country racked by a quarter century of civil strife by bringing unity; that there will be an improvement in education and health care; and that the resources of the country will be exploited to the benefit of the people. It is hoped that the new president’s Christian convictions will lead her into bringing new life and peace to her people.
The recent violent response of many Muslims to Danish newspaper cartoons of the prophet Mohammed should cause us as Christians and Baptists to meditate on how we respond to other religions. I believe there are five “Rs” as to how we, in Jesus’ name, should respond.

Respect: Religion is at the heart of who an individual is. It is an emotional attachment to that understanding of the Divine which gives one meaning and identity. To attack another religion is therefore similar to attacking one’s mother; it brings forth natural impulses of defense and anger. This we have seen in the violent demonstrations in front of the Danish embassies worldwide.

We may not agree with other religions, but we must treat them with respect. Of course as Christians we worship and confess Jesus Christ as God and Savior. The heart of Jesus’ message of the kingdom is love. Therefore, we must love all peoples and respect their identity, culture and religious traditions. To do otherwise would be contrary to the Gospel and negate any opportunity at conversation or witnessing to that love we see in Christ!

Repentance: As Christians we must repent of any offense that we cause another person or religion.

History is replete with religious wars. Crusades, holy wars, jihads and pogroms have fomented evil in the name of God. It is easy to raise the fist and get angry when one’s religion is attacked. Sadly, religions have too often raised the sword and caused tragic destruction of life, thinking that it was God’s will. Indeed the call of Christ is to bear the cross, not wield the sword. Then will we hear the words of our Lord, “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” (Mt. 5:11)

Restraint: Freedom of the press, and freedom of speech are great freedoms that have enabled Western societies to promote other great freedoms such as freedom of religion, freedom from fear, freedom to protest against war and unjust governments, freedom to fight against racism, freedom to defend the orphans and widows, and freedom to demand governments to act justly and to fight against poverty and AIDS. We do not want freedom of the press or freedom of speech restricted.

On the other hand, freedom without discipline soon ends up with anarchy, just as discipline without freedom ends up with totalitarianism. Therefore, part of the democratic process must be self-restraint, discipline and responsibility. The great American Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said that freedom of speech is not the right to stand up in a crowded theater and yell, “Fire!” In the same way the media must refrain from inflaming religious conflict.

It is impossible for Christians to restrain the secular press which attacks all that is holy. Christians, as well as Jews and Muslims, suffer from unfair and unjust caricatures of our faith from an anti-religious and secular press. Therefore, our message must be one of requesting restraint from the secular media and to be responsible journalists in promoting peaceful co-existence.

Reciprocity: “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.” This Golden Rule of Jesus is also affirmed by many other religious traditions. Just as we would call upon Christians to refrain from making derogatory statements about other religious traditions, we would also call upon all co-religionists, be they Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, or Hindu to refrain from attacking the Christian faith and other religions. In other words, in calling for religious freedom we would also call for reciprocity from all majority religions in how they treat their religious minorities. It is for that reason that Baptists have always defended religious freedom and called for the separation of religion from the state. We do not want the state to use religion for its own evil intents or control.

Reconciliation: The heart of the Christian faith is reconciliation. It is the reconciliation of God with man through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Consequently, it is also a call for those who have experienced such reconciliation to also participate in this “ministry of reconciliation.” (II Cor.5:18) As Baptist Christians we must be involved in bringing peace between the various religious traditions and defending all people’s religious freedom, including the Christian freedom to witness to the Good News.

President Obasanjo of Nigeria is a Baptist and formed a Peace Committee to bring reconciliation between fighting Christians and Muslims in his country. A Baptist is chair of this committee, and a committee of 20 religious leaders (10 Christians and 10 Muslims) meets and discusses ways to bring harmony and reconciliation between conflicting religious bodies.

Let’s show the world as Baptists that we follow the Prince of Peace and would be known by his call, “Blessed are the peacemakers!”
Every year, Baptists around the world set aside a special Sunday to recognize the larger body of Christ and pray for each other. We ask God to help those who are denied religious freedom and who suffer for their faith, and pray for the Gospel to reach the ends of the earth. In addition, Baptist churches gather a special offering for the ministries of the Baptist World Alliance.

Your church’s participation in BWA Day will:

- Encourage our brothers and sisters around the world to remain faithful to the Gospel
- Create a renewed unity within the Baptist family
- Liberate our brothers and sisters from oppression
- Provide opportunities for many to respond to claims of Christ and
- Meet the physical and material needs of those who are hurting

Special informational materials for BWA Day, including bulletin inserts, offering envelopes and brochures, are available upon request. Please contact Linda Falimy at: communications@bwanet.org, +1-703-790-8980 (office) or +1-703-893-5160 (fax) to place your order.