The Romani: Perspectives on an ancient people plagued by suspicion and prejudice
BWA Elected to Board of United Nations Body

The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) has been elected to the new board of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO).

CoNGO, formed in 1948, is an independent, international nonprofit association of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Its mission is to facilitate the participation of NGOs in United Nations’ debates and decision making, and it assists a wide variety of NGOs that are in consultative status with the UN.

The BWA, which has held consultative status with the UN since 1974, and has been a member of CoNGO for years, was one of 20 international NGOs elected to the new board’s three-year term.

The organization fosters cooperation and dialogue among all NGOs and with groupings of NGOs related to the UN system; works on behalf of NGOs to develop and enhance their relationship and cooperation with the UN and its various organs; and provides a forum for NGOs with common interests to come together to study, plan, support and act on issues relating to the principles and programs of the UN and its network of agencies.

CoNGO, an active grassroots civil society organization within the UN system, plays an important role in the struggle to make more room for the presence and consideration of the interests of civil society in the UN decision making processes.

The election of the BWA to CoNGO’s board enhances the presence of the BWA in the UN system, placing the BWA in a strategic position to promote its human rights concerns in collaboration with other representatives of the international community.

The elections were held during the 24th General Assembly of CoNGO in New York, which took place from January 17-19. BWA Director of Freedom and Justice Raimundo Barreto and Luiz Nascimento, BWA’s representative at the UN in New York, attended the meetings.

COVER PHOTO

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Unless otherwise noted, photos in the issue are by BWA staff.
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Do We Really Care?

Have many of us not developed, especially in recent times, a growing sense of the impermanence of what exists? This has been awakened by events and trends too numerous to enumerate but which provide much fruit for thought as we reflect on the earth and its people in their relationship with each other.

Violent earthquakes in Japan, Haiti, Chile and New Zealand; rampant flooding in Australia and Brazil; destructive volcanic activity in Indonesia – these are but a few of the natural disasters that have brought untold suffering and death to countless human beings. These developments disturb our calm and are a reminder of the limited extent to which we are truly in control of many of the issues of our times.

Whether it is searing heat in Russia or bitter cold elsewhere, a hurricane or cyclone here, a tornado there, the earth seems to be in a state of upheaval. Whatever we make of the claims and counterclaims of those who say their conclusions are predicated on scientific grounds, the demand of creation care becomes more compelling every day. Yet, not even sound stewardship can ward off some of the dangers we face from natural disasters.

Besides all this, the reality of grinding poverty that traps millions of people on this planet provokes great unease for many of us. As stewards who combine the conviction of creation care with the recognition of needed justice in the relations between people and nations, we realize just how far we are from realizing the demands of justice in our world.

Is it still true that, while 300 million Africans live on less than $1 a day, we are willing to spend $2, $3, and $7 per day to subsidize each cow in the European Union, America and Japan respectively?

Is it still true that four million children in Africa die each year before attaining their fifth year and that two-thirds of these deaths are avoidable? Is it still true that, in Africa as a whole, two persons die every minute of every day from malaria? How far can the aid we give assist the alleviation of the problem of poverty?

No matter the importance we attach to honoring notions of ownership, capacity building and sustainability as crucial to effective development aid, unless the structures that have been put in place can help deliver justice in international relations, the grinding poverty many people face will remain a continuing reality.

Is it not necessary to take a fresh look at the rules governing the operation of institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund? Are we not to consider how just the agreements are regarding world trade? Does the Christian community not need to make a fuller contribution to the emergence of a more just international economic order?

People who care – and there are so many of them in churches and civic groups across the world – will not cease from their labors in bringing relief and development aid to those in need. May we more successfully complement this admirable commitment with a compelling drive to address the structural problems that lead to so much suffering in our world. This certainly is a mandate that neighbor love inspires!
The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) opposes the “Combating Defamation of Religions” resolution passed in December 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly. This resolution is incompatible with the fundamental freedoms of individuals to freely exercise and peacefully express their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.

The 2010 resolution is the latest in a series of resolutions brought before the UN by Islamic countries to counter what these countries saw as orchestrated attacks against Islam in Western nations, particularly after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

The resolution denounces all attacks upon religious places, sites and shrines in violation of international law, and the misuse of registration procedures as a means to limit the right to freedom of religion or belief of members of certain religious communities. It opposes limitations placed on religious publications and the construction of places of worship, which are inconsistent with the exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The BWA and others who oppose this resolution fear that it will amount to an international blasphemy law, similar to those existing in many Muslim countries. These laws are used to silence dissent, to incarcerate political activists and journalists, and thus directly affect the religious freedom rights of non-Muslim minorities in those countries.

Furthermore, it is argued by the BWA and others that human rights are meant to protect individuals, not ideas or governments. The idea of protecting a religious system would contradict the protection of basic individual rights like the freedom of expression. Numerous civil society organizations, including Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Secular, Humanist and Atheist groups, have urged the UN to reject resolutions on defamation of religions.

In 2009, the BWA signed a document entitled A Common Statement from Civil Society on the Concept of the “Defamation of Religions.” The Common Statement argued that such resolutions provide international support for domestic laws against blasphemy, which are often abused by governments to punish the peaceful expression of disfavored political or religious beliefs and ideas.

On the other hand, the document urged governments to combat violence motivated by bias and hatred and to encourage respectful speech and civil dialogue, while at the same time affirming that freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion are integral to the health of free societies and the dignity of the human person. Finally, it endorsed education and public diplomacy as vital tools in the protection of a peaceful and robust exchange of ideas and beliefs.

From the very outset of the founding of the Baptist faith, Baptists have strongly advocated for religious freedom for all. Baptists understand that the claims for religious liberty as well as the freedom of conscience, opinion, and assembly are linked together. Over the years the BWA has passed several resolutions affirming religious freedom as a fundamental human right. On the other hand, it has often encouraged the respect for all other religious faiths.

The BWA rejects the idea that religious intolerance will go away through the passing of laws restricting the freedom of expression. The BWA favors educational initiatives to promote respect for all religions, and opposes all dissemination of hatred based on religious beliefs, ethnicity, race or any other form of discrimination.

India

At least 10 people died, several hundred houses were burned, and an estimated 50,000 people were displaced following clashes between two tribes in the Northeast Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya.

Baptists mobilized resources to assist the displaced and those otherwise affected.

The disturbances between the Garo and Rabha tribes began on January 1 following an alleged attack on a Garo Baptist pastor in Meghalaya who was returning from a family wedding earlier on December 22. “Many villages have been torched and people left homeless,” reported Wanne Garrey of the Garo Baptist Convention. Church leaders, she said, tried “their best to calm down the situation.”

The incidents occurred in the East Garo Hills region of Meghalaya and the Goalpara district of Assam, both bordering each other. The region has a large Baptist population. Much of Northeast India, including the states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur, has significant concentrations of Baptist Christians.

“The Garo Baptist Convention has started its relief work,” Garrey reported in January. “It is very sad and many are still living in temporary relief camps in pathetic conditions though some have returned home. Healing will take time as many have lost their property.”

The area was placed under heavy curfew for several days. After the curfew was lifted, the banning of the assembly of more than five persons was enforced.

Shambhu Singh, a government official, reportedly claimed that the ethnic clashes between the warring tribes were “very well planned and there may be some organizations behind it.”

Two peace committees were formed comprising district officials, religious leaders and civil society groups from both tribes.
The Baptist World Alliance strongly condemns the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, the government minister for religious minorities in Pakistan, and an advocate for reform of Pakistan’s controversial blasphemy laws.

The BWA appeals to Pakistan authorities to bring the killers to justice. The failure of the South Asian country to uphold human rights commitments and obligations that it signed gives encouragement to extremists who continue to threaten non-Muslim minorities with impunity.

Bhatti, the only Christian in Pakistan’s cabinet and a leading voice opposing the nation’s harsh anti-blasphemy laws, was gunned down by three men in Islamabad on March 2.

In January, Salman Taseer, the governor of Pakistan’s Punjab province, died after he was shot by one of his bodyguards for his opposition to Pakistan’s anti-blasphemy laws, and for his supposed support of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted of blasphemy by a Pakistan court. Bibi was sentenced to the death penalty by hanging in November 2010 and is still awaiting the verdict of a superior court. Her case has gained worldwide attention.

Pakistan has one of the strictest anti-blasphemy laws among countries with a Muslim-majority population. The law intends to protect Islamic authority. However, it has been used to threaten non-Muslim minorities who make up five percent of Pakistan’s population.

Christians, the largest religious minority group in the nation, are now deprived of their most prominent advocate, and are being increasingly threatened by extremist Muslims.

Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistani government minister for religious minorities who was murdered in Islamabad in March.

Photo courtesy of http://deborahgyapong.blogspot.com

Pakistan

BWA Condemns Killing of Minister for Minorities

Callam Admonishes Nigerian President to Protect Christians

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam has strongly urged the president of Nigeria to ensure the security and protection of all its citizens, including Christians.

In a letter addressed to Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the Nigerian president, Callam expressed grave concern at the attacks in the cities of Jos and Maiduguri where Christians, including Baptists, were attacked and killed on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2010.

Callam insisted that those who committed these acts of violence should be brought to justice, and asked that the president “take all necessary measures to eliminate the conflict and violence with their accompanying human rights violations.”

Indicating that one of the churches attacked was the Victory Baptist Church in Maiduguri, the capital and the largest city of Borno State in northeastern Nigeria, Callam informed the Nigerian president that the pastor and several members of the congregation were among those killed, while the pastor’s house was set on fire.

“This kind of violence that broke out during one of the most important Christian celebrations, Christmas, claiming many innocent lives, is unacceptable,” Callam told the Nigerian leader. “We urge Your Excellency to ensure the protection and security of all citizens in the areas of conflict, [and] introduce more programs that ensure peace and reconciliation.”

Callam also sent a letter of encouragement and support to Ademola Solomon Ishola, general secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC). “It was with great shock and profound sorrow that we heard the news of the tragic and unprompted attacks against Christian churches in Jos and Maiduguri,” Callam said. “We are immensely saddened by this new episode of violence against our brothers and sisters in northern Nigeria . . . which have become so frequent. On behalf of the Baptist family around the world, we extend our prayers and solidarity to the families of those who died, and to those who have been injured.”

Baptists and other Christians, mainly in northern Nigeria, have come under increasing attacks in recent years. Approximately 1,000 persons died from what were allegedly religious clashes in 2001.

In November 2008, some 300 persons were killed, at least 12 of them Baptists, and five Baptist churches were burned during riots sparked by local election results. In July 2009, major religious violence committed by the Islamist group Boko Haram in four cities in northeast Nigeria, including Maiduguri, left more than 700 people dead.

In January 2010, approximately 500 persons died from clashes between Muslim and Christian factions, with an estimated 5,000 persons displaced by the fighting. Six Baptist members were among those killed while seven Baptist churches were burned. In March of last year, more than 500 Christians were killed, most being women and children, in villages close to Jos, the administrative capital of Plateau State.

The attacks in December left dozens dead in both Jos and Maiduguri. The violence, suspected to be carried out by Boko Haram, continued into January, including attacks against a number of police stations. Several police officers have reportedly been killed.

Nigeria, where there are two BWA member bodies, has the largest number of Baptists in Africa. The NBC has 2.5 million members in 9,500 churches. The Mambilla Baptist Convention has 23,000 members in 255 churches.
As political crises in the Middle East and North Africa deepen at the time of writing, we implore our Baptist brothers and sisters from all over the world to pray for a peaceful resolution to all conflicts; that liberty and freedom will be extended to all citizens; that the course of true justice will be set in motion; and that Christians in these countries will draw on the power and grace that come only from God.

Mounir Yacoub, vice president of the Egyptian Baptist Convention and pastor of First Baptist Church in Cairo, sent requests for prayer.

“Pray that the Lord might enable us as a church to restore and maintain our vision. The church has a lot to do in the coming weeks. There is a lot of destruction in the country. We need to be positive and active in our communities and serve our people practically to rebuild and restore. “A lot of Egyptian families lost a lot and it is our time to step up and help. Pray for us to receive a special power and direction from the Lord to help and comfort them. The coming days are a golden opportunity for us to interact with people. “Pray that the Lord may complete his healing for his wounded children from fear and all negative feelings. Pray that we might also be able to support and encourage even those outside the church.”

The Baptist World Alliance asks Baptists to pray with Yacoub, not only for Egypt, but for all other countries experiencing turmoil at this time.

BOOK NOTE

Few who attended the closing service of the 20th Baptist World Congress will soon forget the sermon delivered by outstanding African American preacher, Lance Watson. Worship in the “Black Church” in the USA is often a memorable experience.

Those who are unfamiliar with the “Black Church” are grateful to authors who assist our understanding of it. T. DeWitt Smith Jr., a distinguished preacher and the 18th president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, is one of the helpful writers on the subject.


Smith offers a profile of the biblical teaching on the deacon in the service of the church and a characterization of how this teaching is appropriated in African American churches.
Callam Outlines

FIVE-YEAR PLAN

By Eron Henry

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam laid out broad plans for the current five-year period, 2010-2015, at a meeting of the BWA Executive Committee in March.

Callam, in his report, stated that the theme for the period is “In Step with the Spirit,” and focuses on five strategic priorities – promoting worship, fellowship and unity; nurturing the passion for mission and evangelism; responding to people in need; defending human rights and justice; and promoting relevant theological reflection.

Among the goals for the five years is to increase the number of Baptist groups that are associated with the BWA. Callam informed Executive members that there are 110 million Baptists around the world, yet less than half, or 42 million, are represented within the BWA in 218 member conventions and unions in 120 countries.

As part of the quest to improve fellowship and promote unity, Callam said the BWA will help to resolve problems that have led to estrangement by some groups from the worldwide Baptist family, and that resources will be made available that may assist churches to “heal broken relationships within their national life.” A special commission on intra-Baptist relationships will play a significant role in facilitating the strengthening of relationships among leaders of national Baptist groups around the world.

Callam also believes that there should be “intentional efforts to facilitate active involvement of the laity in BWA programs,” as well as to “facilitate social networking for BWA-related common interest groups.”

In its mission endeavors, the BWA will promote the use of “indigenously relevant material for Christian education and pastoral training for use especially among Baptists,” including the acquisition of and distribution of the Bible and other Christian literature in local languages, and by supporting theological education and ministerial training through the provision of religious materials.

Of significance is the “Jesus Christ, Bread of Life” initiative which will, among other things, arrange conferences to offer support to churches in mission and evangelism and help in resourcing churches for mission. The first conference is set for August 2011 in Kohima, Nagaland, India.

The BWA will seek to gather information from member bodies and churches on mission opportunities and share this information with the wider Baptist family to facilitate cross cultural, short- and long-term partnerships.

Relief, Development, Freedom and Justice

An important enterprise of the BWA over the five years is the promotion of “‘best practices’ for Baptist involvement in sustainable relief and development” programs. As such, the organization will assist regional bodies in the setting up of Disaster Risk Management Information Systems and will organize training opportunities in grant writing for development projects.
There is a need, the general secretary said, for an increased level of understanding among Baptists as to the reality and effects of poverty. Thus, the BWA will not only disseminate information on the state of poverty around the world, but will also “provide and encourage prophetic critique” of economic policies that give rise to, or exacerbate, poverty. The BWA will engage in informed analyses on the causes of poverty; provide resources related to poverty relief and alleviation; and encourage churches to take practical measures to eradicate poverty such as through the establishment of literacy and skills training programs and the sponsorship of income and microenterprise projects.

A commitment to freedom and justice has been at the heart of Baptist witness since the founding of the Baptist faith in the early 17th century. Every attempt will be made to remain true to this historical commitment. The BWA has, therefore, renewed its resolve to “expose and respond to situations of abuse,” the general secretary said. It will “promote peace, justice, and freedom as priorities of Baptist life,” and every attempt will be made to “identify and give more visibility to Baptists and their organizations” that are engaged in human rights and justice issues.

Practical steps include the creation of a “Baptist human rights advocacy network”; the development and maintenance of a BWA Freedom and Justice Database, an “increase [in] BWA participation, especially through the United Nations, in programs aimed at defending human rights in the international arena;” and the conducting of “freedom and justice visits of strategic importance.” Information gleaned from such visits is to be shared with relevant UN bodies and human rights agencies. Baptist churches and organizations will be sensitized to freedom and justice issues around the world, inviting their prayerful and active participation.

Baptists, of necessity, need to reflect theologically in order to exercise responsible Christian discipleship and stewardship. Such theological reflection will be an integral part of Baptist meetings and conferences, such as at the Annual Gathering and the Baptist International Conference on Theological Education. The BWA sees a need to “encourage intentional theological education at all levels in the church community,” and to “encourage ongoing discussion on ecclesiological issues of concern to Baptists.” It is recognized that there are some countries that are more resourced than others; hence the BWA will promote the sharing of resources for theological education.

Importantly, the BWA will continue “to promote understanding and to spread goodwill among Christian World Communions.” As a follow-up to other talks that the BWA has held in the past, the international Baptist organization will continue to explore dialogues with other groups. At the BWA Executive meeting, members accepted proposals from Callam that the BWA explore opportunities for dialogues with Seventh Day Adventists and Pentecostals.

Callam indicated that his proposals came about after a long process of consultation and planning. He also indicated that “not all the goals may be realized” in the period, but is nevertheless convinced that the plan reflects a conviction that the “BWA’s existence is to serve God’s will for the involvement of the churches and their members in God’s plan for humanity and all of creation.”
The Baptist World Alliance Executive Committee received reports and endorsed several proposals during its meeting at the BWA Center in Falls Church, Virginia, in the United States in March.

Treasurer Carolyn Fossen and Financial Comptroller Margaret Pearson informed the meeting that the BWA came out of 2010 with a deficit of only US$15,000. This was reported as highly commendable in light of the continued impact of the downturn in many of the world’s economies and effects of the global financial meltdown in 2007/2008.

Significantly, it was also reported that the Baptist World Congress held in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, from July 28-August 1, 2010, realized a surplus of just under US$110,000. BWA General Secretary Neville Callam was commended for the hard work he expended to reduce financial obligations that the BWA faced for hotel rooms that the BWA had contracted, and which were unfilled, due to persons not being able to attend the event due to the financial crisis, visa denials and other reasons.

BWA President John Upton told the meeting that he visited South Africa in February where he met with South African President Jacob Zuma and Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, king of the Zulu Nation. Zuma told Upton, “You Baptists spoke out for us (black South Africans, during Apartheid) when not many around the world would do so. I’m proud of you.”

“You Baptists are stubborn. We didn’t treat you well, but you kept coming with your hospitals and schools. Thank you. You did good work,” kaBhekuzulu, a Baptist minister, told Upton.

Upton also visited with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon along with Billy Kim, a former president of the BWA.

The BWA took on several freedom and justice initiatives during the past year, including responding to situations of conflict in a number of countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, and Nigeria, and corresponded with Christians experiencing violations in Morocco, Iraq, Turkey, and elsewhere.

In the regions, the Union of Baptists in Latin America informed Executive members of a missionary strategy called Radical Latino aimed at training persons 18 to 33 years old to work in different teams in Latin America for 11 months. These missioners will, among other things, plant new congregations and reopen closed and abandoned churches in collaboration with local churches.

The European Baptist Federation (EBF) indicated that it welcomed into its membership the First Baptist Church of Bahrain and Baptists of Samsun in Turkey. The EBF informed Executive members that the Baptist Union of Sweden has committed itself to form a united church with the Methodist and Mission Covenant churches.

Last year saw several disasters across the Caribbean, the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF) said – the earthquake in Haiti in January, and the effects of tropical storms in Jamaica, St. Kitts, and St. Lucia. At the same time, Baptists from within the region responded to all these disasters by offering donations and support.

Left: Among those who addressed the Executive Committee were BWA President John Upton, Treasurer Carolyn Fossen, NABF General Secretary George Bullard, along with David Kerrigan who gave the Constitution and Bylaws Committee report.
The CBF also affirmed a five-year plan that will guide the programs and ministries of the BWA regional body.

A number of disasters also occurred in the Asia Pacific region in 2010—volcanic eruptions in Indonesia and cyclones and tsunamis in Indonesia and the Philippines. In addition, recovery continues due to past disasters such as cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and tsunamis in the Andaman Islands.

The Self Supporting Kayin Baptist Mission Society was accepted into membership within the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation.

A meeting was held in Uganda in October 2010 to discuss the implications of a referendum in Sudan to determine the status of Baptists should the south secede to create a new country, an outcome that was deemed likely. Mount Meru University in Tanzania is currently engaged in running a two-year diploma teacher training program in Sudan, in which 20 Sudanese are currently enrolled.

During 2010, the All Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship, in conjunction with His Nets, distributed 1,000 treated mosquito nets to clinics, schools, and orphanages in Zimbabwe.

The North American Baptist Fellowship indicated that another New Baptist Covenant event will be held during 2011. The first such meeting was held in 2008 in Atlanta and brought together a wide diversity of Baptists from across North America.

Upcoming meetings of the BWA include the 2011 Annual Gathering in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and the 2012 Annual Gathering in Santiago, Chile. The next Baptist Youth World Conference will be in Singapore in July 2013.

More than 100 persons from several countries attended BWA Executive Committee and other committee meetings at the BWA Center in Falls Church, Virginia, from March 6-9.

Wati Aier, principal of the Oriental Theological Seminary (OTS) in Dimapur in the Northeast Indian state of Nagaland, is the recipient of the 2011 Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award. The award is given annually to an individual who has engaged in significant and effective activities to secure, protect, restore or preserve human rights.

Aier is being recognized for his work in helping to broker the signing of a peace accord between three nationalist groups in Nagaland in September 2010.

For decades, the three groups in Nagaland have been in conflict with each other and with the Indian government over issues of autonomy and sovereignty for Nagaland state and the Naga people. Between 1992 and 2009, more than 2,330 insurgency-related fatalities have been recorded in Nagaland. As a result of the longstanding disputes, which date back more than 50 years, exceptionally tight security has been imposed on the state by the Indian government, with multiple checkpoints scattered throughout the state. International visitors are required to obtain special permits to enter and move around Nagaland.

Aier, founder of OTS in 1991, was convener of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR), which comprised several organizations, including Baptist groups. He spent almost 20 years trying to bring the warring groups to the negotiating table. The FNR, formed in 2008, convened more than 60 meetings of the various Naga factions in the peace process, culminating in the September 2010 meeting.

“Over the years Wati has worked tirelessly, often against overwhelming odds, to keep a process alive that would allow deeply conflicted Naga parties to negotiate their bitter differences sufficient to extinguish the flames of violence,” said Ken Sehested, co-pastor of the Circle of Mercy Congregation in Asheville, North Carolina, in the United States, who has known Aier since 1993.

Aier, a former vice president of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, helped to found a liberal arts junior college program for Karen refugees from Myanmar in the Mae Le refugee camp in Thailand, near the border with Myanmar. He also helped to launch the Karen Bible School in the same camp where OTS graduates are the main teachers.

He previously served as a member of the BWA Commission on Freedom and Justice and the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup. He now serves on the BWA Commission on Peace and on the BWA Congress Committee.

The Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award is given out each year during the BWA Annual Gathering, which will be held this year in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from July 4-9. Previous recipients include Gustavo Parajon from Nicaragua, Joao and Nora Matawana from Angola, Dennis Datta from Bangladesh, and Leena Lavanya from India.

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Stories of Hope and Challenge continued
BWA Accepts Three New Member Bodies

Three unions in Africa are to be presented for formal acceptance as member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance during the General Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in July.

The Membership Committee of the BWA recommended to the BWA Executive Committee in March that the Baptist Churches Union Community of Congo, the Association of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Congo, and the Free Baptist Churches of Burundi be accepted into BWA membership. The recommendation will be forwarded to the General Council for a vote. The General Council convenes during the BWA Annual Gathering, which will be held in Kuala Lumpur from July 4-9.

The Baptist Churches Union Community of Congo is an association of 46,321 members in 372 churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Established in 1964, the union has offices located in Kikwit, the largest city in Kwilu Province in the southwestern part of the DRC.

Established in 1994, the Association of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Congo comprises 3,021 members in 36 churches. Its offices are in Goma, a city in the eastern DRC.

If both bodies are accepted, they will increase the number of BWA member bodies to 10 in the DRC, a vast country, the third largest by area in Africa.

The Free Baptist Churches of Burundi was formed in 2004 and has 8,023 members in 70 churches, and was previously accepted as an Associate BWA Member in 2006. It has offices in Bujumbura, the capital and largest city in Burundi, a landlocked country in the Great Lakes region of East Africa. It will join the Union of Baptist Churches in Burundi as a BWA member body.

If the three unions are accepted, the number of BWA member bodies will increase to 221.

When the inaugural congress of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) met in London in 1905, the delegates decided to appoint individuals to serve as BWA vice presidents for each of the participating countries. Over the course of time, the organization has made many changes affecting the number and role of vice presidents.

In 2009, the General Council amended the BWA constitution. The changes made were in response to a proposal of the Implementation Task Force that was established to routinize the findings of the BWA Twentieth Century Committee into the life of the BWA.

The BWA would have 12 vice presidents, two from each of the six BWA regions. These vice presidents commenced their five-year term of service at the end of the 20th Baptist World Congress in Hawai‘i. According to BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, the vice presidents fulfill an important ambassadorial role in the worldwide Baptist family. Callam has expressed appreciation for the service they are rendering to the BWA.

The general secretary appointed all of the vice presidents to serve on the BWA Promotion and Development Committee, one of the few committees over which Callam has appointive power. In addition, Vice President Nabil Costa was appointed to chair the Special Commission on Baptist-Muslim Relations. Furthermore, each of the vice presidents is on at least one additional committee or commission of the organization. Of course, they also serve on the BWA General Council.

Celebrating the willingness of the vice presidents to carry out representative work at his request, Callam identified a number of engagements they have fulfilled since Hawai‘i. Regina Claas represented the BWA General Secretary at the Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa. Victor Gonzales did the same at the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship Service to honor and thank past BWA regional secretary, Peter Pinder.

Paul Msiza accompanied the general secretary in important discussions with Baptists in Kenya and has agreed to lead
in further talks to fulfill specific goals. Burchell Taylor is representing the BWA at the upcoming International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to be held in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011. Soon, dialogue will ensue with Olu Menjay and Paul Msiza regarding the 2015 BWA Congress and with John Kok concerning the 2011 Annual Gathering.

BWA is aware of many other ways in which the vice presidents are initiating contacts in their respective regions with a view to promoting the unity of Baptists worldwide. The work done in this regard by John Kok, for example, has been outstanding. In addition, Daniel Carro, who was named first vice president, has responded to requests from the general secretary thereby contributing to the furtherance of BWA unity worldwide.

BWA celebrates the contribution of our vice presidents to the ongoing mission of the organization.
The German Baptists are ready to assist you in whatever way possible, through the network of the Baptist World Alliance. As Christians we are a worldwide community standing strong for each other – connected to the Lord.

— Regina Claas, Germany
he wrote to Callam. “It is very encouraging for us to receive a message from you . . . . We need your help and prayer.”

About half of the 14 JBU churches along the coast were destroyed or badly damaged, and a number of Baptist members have been unaccounted for. JBC was able to make contact with only two of its four churches that are in Sendai.

Baptists from around the world have been expressing great support for Japan. Joel Dorsinville, coordinator for disaster relief for the Haiti Baptist Convention, told Baptists in Japan that “the trial of the Japanese people is bringing back to us sad memories of January 12, 2010, (date of the massive earthquake in Haiti) but at the same time it is reminding us of the worldwide solidarity of the great Baptist family through the Baptist World Alliance.” Dorsinville told Japanese Baptists, “We are praying that our Baptist brothers and sisters in Japan may be assured of the solidarity in prayers of their brothers and sisters in Haiti.”

Regina Claas, general secretary of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany, wrote to Japan, stating, “I want to express my sincere sympathy to you – our fellow Christians in Japan. The German Baptists are deeply shocked about the disaster that has struck your country.” Claas, a vice president of the BWA, said, “We are also ready to assist you in whatever way possible, through the network of the Baptist World Alliance. As Christians we are a worldwide community standing strong for each other – connected to the Lord who is in control over every situation.”

Ilia Osepashvili, bishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, said, “We are all deeply touched by the tragedy in Japan. We have already contacted the Japan Embassy in Georgia to express our condolences and sympathies towards the Japanese people in this time of sorrow. We also want to bring our humble financial contribution for the benefit of the disaster for the affected people.”

Everton Jackson, executive secretary/treasurer of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, wrote to the JBC and the JBU “expressing our condolences and solidarity.”

An earthquake measuring 9.0 occurred in the western Pacific Ocean 130 kilometers, or 81 miles, east of the city of Sendai in the mid-afternoon of March 11. The quake created tsunami waves of up to 10 meters, or 33 feet, sweeping aside cars and flooding various buildings as the waves traveled inland. The quake was preceded by several powerful foreshocks and was followed by a number of strong aftershocks.

More than 11,300 persons have been confirmed dead in Japan to date, more than 2,750 injured, and more than 16,000 missing. Many more are feared dead.

Donations

may be sent to the BWAid Emergency Response Fund at http://www.bwanet.org/bwa.php?site=general&id=4 or to:

Baptist World Aid
405 North Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046
USA
Haiti is still reeling from the earthquake that created scenes of devastation and destruction more than a year ago on January 12, 2010. Chaos seems to reign in Port-au-Prince in particular – many buildings still lay in ruins, streets are heavily strewn with garbage, gullies and drains are clogged, roadside vending is the norm, traffic is maddening, and there seems to be a general lack of a sense of order – except in Pétion-Ville where the elites of the country generally reside.

Elsewhere, further north, it is difficult to shake the feeling that these mainly farming communities have been largely forgotten in any development plan for the country, if there has been a development plan at all. Haiti, a land of freedom, having gained its independence by revolution more than two centuries earlier – an example and an inspiration to many other countries – is still writhing in pain.

Yet another thing appears evident. Despite decades of hardship, deprivation, exploitation and misrule, Haitians appear defiant. Rather than a cowed spirit, one senses a strong sense of pride. There is too, a clear-headed awareness by Baptist leaders as to what is wrong, and what needs to be done.

Education the Key to National Development

Baptist leaders – both among the Haiti Baptist Convention (HBC) and Baptist Haiti Mission (BHM) – believe that education lies at the heart of the country’s transformation. In this, Haiti is not unique. Back in the 19th century, Baptist and other churches in Jamaica, Haiti’s Caribbean neighbor to the west, established schools to educate newly emancipated slaves long before the country’s political leaders saw the necessity to do so. Those schools now form the backbone of Jamaica’s educational system.

Baptist leaders view education as so critical that most Baptist churches in Haiti have an attached school. Of the 350 churches affiliated with the BHM, there are 330 schools. Similarly, the 112 churches of the HBC operate more than 100 schools. In 1993, the HBC converted what was then a theological seminary, geared primarily to the training of pastors, to a four year university granting degrees in agriculture, business & computer science, fine arts & Christian leadership, and theology. The vision of turning the school into a degree-granting college was both visionary and prescient. The Northern Haiti Christian University (UCNH) now suffers from a lack of capacity, as it struggles to keep up with requests for enrollments.

The lack of space has been exacerbated since the earthquake. Students from Port-au-Prince who had their education disrupted because of the quake are now trying to get into the UCNH, which is located in Limbé in the largely under-served rural north of Haiti, about one hour by road outside of Haiti’s second largest city, Cap-Haitien. It is one of only a handful of colleges located outside of a major Haitian city. The university, headed by Jules Casseus, its founding president, is attempting to meet the need by constructing a new dorm for female students, with funds donated by the
Baptist World Alliance. In the meantime, the university is struggling to find housing for the additional 95 students who have been enrolled directly as a result of the earthquake.

Casseus himself is trying to instill in his students a vision for a new Haiti. The university president declared at a graduation ceremony that “permanent, incessant and total education – university education – is the ultimate weapon for the emancipation of the people of Haiti.” He implored his students and the university community that in Haiti “we must submit to the rigor of a thorough education, a specialized education to change our mentality, our worldview, our outlook toward the well, the good and the beautiful.”

Casseus, who was president of the seminary that preceded the university and the author of several books including Haiti What Kind of Church...What Kind of Freedom? and Elements of Haitian Theology, decried individualism, mismanagement, and environmental degradation in the Caribbean country. “The case of Haiti remains a clinical case,” he said. “We hurt ourselves by our ignorance, our individualism and our irresponsibility that make our living conditions worse.”

Leaders of the convention easily deflected questions as to what is better for Haiti at this time, to build schools or to build houses for those who still suffer the effects of the earthquake. I raised this question in the light of the request by the convention that the BWA, through Baptist World Aid, use earthquake relief funds to build a school and an orphanage in Port-au-Prince. Their response: there are enough NGOs committed to providing houses in Haiti; there is a need to pay special attention to those most neglected and who suffered most severely, even before the earthquake – children; and, they insist, education is the only way to lead Haiti out of its long term dilemma of underdevelopment.

BWAid is thus pouring significant sums into a school and orphanage in Delmas 19, a particularly depressed area of Port-au-Prince. This institution, which will be able to accommodate 250 students and 30 orphans, will

(Continued on next page)
be a bright spark in an otherwise stark community marked by poverty and its attendant ills.

**Relief Efforts**

But both the HBC and BHM, while committed to the long term goal of Haiti’s development through education, have been engaged in short term relief efforts to stem the effects of both the earthquake and the cholera outbreak. The latter started in October 2010 and has claimed thousands of lives and sickened thousands more. I met several pastors, mainly in the north who, using BWA funds, took persons to medical facilities, and who, using those funds, provided tablets and chlorine bleach for water purification and treatment. I met several families sickened by cholera who were saved by the use of BWA funds for medical care.

In all this, BWA through BWAd is helping to solve the cholera problem through one simple solution – the construction of latrines. One amazing feature of Haitian life, at least in the rural north, is the absence of toilet facilities. Many of the 330 schools operated by the BHM and the more than 100 schools run by the HBC do not have toilet facilities for the children, and many of these schools have 200 to 300 students on enrollment. The need for toilet facilities appears to be one of the most urgent needs there is.
Therefore even though the BWA has, in collaboration with both the HBC and BHM, constructed almost 100 toilets, the need is still yet great.

Housing is still a major issue in Port-au-Prince. Hundreds of thousands live in tents and under tarpaulins since the earthquake. I visited one small tent city and was allowed inside a tent where a family of nine – a couple and their seven children – live in a space difficult for three persons to maneuver. Phillipe, who granted me permission to visit her tent, and her family, were among the fortunate few. They were expected to move, within a matter of weeks, into one of the houses being constructed by the BWA and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board.

The HBC has an ambitious plan – the construction of a new development complete with houses, schools, and various social amenities. The US$2 million project calls for much faith and effort. What Haitian Baptists plan to do is reminiscent of Jamaica as well. Beginning in the 1830s, after the demise of slavery, Jamaican churches, led mainly by the Baptists, bought former sugar plantations, divided these estates, and sold the lots at bargain basement prices to the emancipated slaves, creating what came to be known as Free Villages. These Free Villages, in the 19th and 20th centuries, formed the foundation for Jamaica’s strong farming and independent rural peasantry from which emerged many Jamaicans into the professional and managerial classes.

Can Haitian Baptists help to lead the way to a renewed and revitalized Haiti? With their long term commitment to education and resolve to provide for the spiritual and social sustenance of the people, Baptists are positioning themselves to make a meaningful contribution to national development.
The earthquake in Chile on February 27, 2010, provided an opportunity for Baptists in the South American country to demonstrate their commitment to the love and compassion of Christ.

And this they did. The 8.8 temblor, one of the strongest in recorded history, along with a tsunami, killed more than 4,300 persons. Thousands of homes were destroyed, leaving tens of thousands homeless. Two hundred and fifty churches affiliated with the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile (UBACH) were badly damaged or destroyed. Several Baptist pastors and their members were living in tents, many losing everything.

Nearly half of the country was declared a disaster zone.

Shortly after the quake, teams of Baptists from both UBACH and the Convention of Baptist Churches of the Chilean Mission traveled throughout the devastated areas to assess the damage, determine needs, and to offer comfort. Both UBACH and the Chilean Mission, through their own resources and other funds, including up to US$100,000 from the BWA, have engaged in immediate and long term relief efforts for many who suffered from the earthquake and tsunami.

“Because of the offering that Baptist World Aid gave us we were able to bring with us food, medicines, evangelistic tracks, blankets and many other supplies” in the relief efforts, said Raquel Contreras, president of UBACH at the time of the earthquake.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam saw firsthand the work of Baptists during a visit he made to Chile almost one year after the event, in January 2011. Callam, along with BWA Women’s Department Director Patsy Davis, toured Concepción and Constitución, two of the hardest hit areas. They visited the Pacific coast at the opening of a river where the tsunami submerged an island, and viewed the memorial erected to the approximately 250 persons who were killed as a result of the deluge. They visited with Mauricio Muñoz, a Baptist pastor who lived close to the island whose home was destroyed by the tsunami. His Bible was the only personal possession he was able to recover from his home.

They traveled on to Cauquenes, a fishing town where the boats were lost or dismantled by the tsunami, threatening the livelihood of its citizens. And they saw the Baptist church in the town that collapsed, except for a small building in the back. Callam and Davis went to Santa Clara, a low income area where virtually everything was wiped out, and where the population was moved to safer, higher ground on a soccer field. They traveled
on to Talcahuano city and stood where once a Baptist church was — before the earthquake.

The destruction in Concepción was palpable. They viewed an apartment building that crumbled, much like stacked pancakes, and where a Baptist woman who lived on the eleventh floor miraculously survived.

There were other stories of joy and hope. In the midst of evident destruction, Callam saw love at work. The Baptist church in Coelemu crumbled, but it is being rebuilt by a membership that comprises mostly women. The first thing they built was the baptistery, because there were persons waiting to be baptized.

Baptists constructed a village of temporary housing in Santa Clara, where Baptist youth helped in the relief efforts. What impressed Callam were the efforts made to honor the dignity of the people. Persons were allowed to choose the color for their houses, and each house is numbered and assigned the surname of the residents. In the village, there is the “green house” which serves as a social gathering area, a “salmon color house” which serves as a school, and a “brown house” which is the chapel. Callam witnessed Baptist youth working with children at the school.

Callam visited Radio Manantial, a radio station run by Oscar Baza, pastor of the Quirihue Baptist Church. The

Radio Ministry in Chile Unaffected by Earthquake

When, at 3:34 a.m. on February 27, 2010, Chile was rocked by a massive earthquake measuring 8.8 on the Richter scale, one person who wondered what the effect might be on the ministries he offers was the Rev. Oscar Baza. A Baptist minister working in the beautiful small town of Quirihue, Baza serves with the Baptist church which also operates a small radio station in a building adjoining the worship center.

Driving through Quirihue on January 17, 2011, one could still see signs of the devastation caused by the earthquake. The Roman Catholic Church building was still wide open to the heavens, the roof gone and most of its walls only a haunting memory. The Baptist church building was also destroyed by the earthquake, but, thanks to the help given, rebuilding work was almost complete.

The restoration of the Baptist church building is the result of the vision and generosity of Dr. Michael Toby and the Woodway First Baptist Church which he leads in Waco, Texas, in the United States. They provided designers, engineers, builders, and materials and, in record time, they set up a metal-framed building largely replicating the one the earthquake wiped out. Soon, worship services would resume at the Quirihue Baptist Church.

Baza celebrates the fact that, although the church building was destroyed, the annex hosting his small radio station which operates on the frequency modulation (FM) band was left intact. As a result, the radio ministry continued unaffected.

FM operates on less than 100 kilowatts of power but reaches the community in which it is set, together with adjacent towns. Programming is primarily music-based, but Baza hosts a call-in program which enjoys wide listenership. The earthquake has not prevented the Quirihue Baptist Church and Radio Manantial from continuing to proclaim the Good News.

Callam at Radio Manantial with Oscar Baza
Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), granted an initial sum of US$10,000 for earthquake relief in New Zealand.

BWAid sent the funds in response to the devastating 6.3 magnitude quake that struck on February 22 in the city of Christchurch in the Canterbury region of New Zealand’s South Island. The temblor caused widespread damage and multiple fatalities with at least 113 confirmed deaths and 228 persons missing.

On September 4, 2010, a 7.1 earthquake occurred near Christchurch causing significant destruction of property, including damage to several Baptist churches. The February 22 earthquake is regarded as an aftershock of this earlier occurrence.

Peter Mihaere, general director of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society, said that the earthquake was “felt in every New Zealand home. We are stunned as a nation as we experience one of our darkest moments as a country.” He reported at the time that “all of our pastors and their families are safe but some of their congregants and their families are still missing. We pray their rescue is soon.” He indicated that “a number of church buildings have suffered much damage and we know of one historic building and all buildings near it (that) are completely destroyed.”

Rodney Macann, national leader of the Baptist Union of New Zealand (BUZ), said that the nation “is reeling in the wake of a disaster which by world standards is not huge but nevertheless devastating for the people of the Canterbury region.” Macann stated that the disaster “poses questions for the city and the future ministry of our churches.”

Kelvin Fairhall, national administrator of the BUZ, conveyed gratitude to the BWA and all Baptists for their support and help. “Thank you very much for this expression of support; we certainly appreciate this coming from the worldwide family of Baptists.”

Mihaere said that “your continued prayers and support are called for as we begin the long and slow process of keeping the hope of God before our people and the wider community of Christchurch.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam expressed sorrow and solidarity of support to New Zealand Baptists and all those affected by the disaster. “We in the BWA are saddened by the loss of life and property and those who are listed as missing. The BWA calls on all Baptists throughout the world to enter into prayer for the country of New Zealand and to offer assistance where needed.”

Callam described the trip as “a salutary reminder of the difference Christians can make when they respond thoughtfully to the needs of people affected by a natural disaster. The unity of love and care can overwhelm even the cynic.”

“The destruction was palpable . . .
. . . stories of joy and hope
. . . love at work”.

Callam with Bernadino Morales, coordinator for disaster relief for the Chile Baptist Union, inspecting a school in Santa Clara that was put together by Baptist youth for victims of the earthquake that occurred February 27, 2010.
The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) encouraged Baptists in Australia and Brazil as they grappled with the after-effects of severe flooding that devastated parts of their countries.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “The Baptist World Alliance is saddened by the loss of life and the dislocations that have occurred in both Australia and Brazil. We are heartened that our Baptist brothers and sisters in these countries are rising to the challenge to offer prayer and material support to those who have suffered.”

A series of floods caused from record rainfalls and a compromised dam have affected the Australian state of Queensland since December 2010. The deluge resulted in severe damage in about 70 towns, including the capital, Brisbane; the deaths of at least 30 citizens; and the evacuation of thousands.

Baptist Union of Queensland General Superintendent David Loder indicated that maintaining contact in the affected areas proved difficult because of “phone outages and phone congestion.” Of the churches from which reports were gleaned at the time, only a few experienced minor damage. “We thank the Lord that, as far as we know, there has been no loss of life in our Baptist family,” Loder said. He stated, however, that “many church people will have been evacuated, isolated and suffered property loss and damage.”

The Baptist Union of Australia, Queensland Baptists, and the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, appealed to their constituencies for donations and funds to assist victims of the flooding.

In Brazil, flooding in the mountainous regions of the state of Rio de Janeiro beginning on January 11 led to massive mudslides and the deaths of more than 500 persons, mainly in the cities of Teresópolis, Nova Friburgo, Petrópolis and Sumidouro.

The Brazilian Baptist Convention through its Social Action Department, the Home Mission Board, and the Baptist Convention of Fluminense, mobilized and garnered support for people who were left homeless as a result of torrential rains in Rio de Janeiro. Appeals were sent to Brazilian Baptists for prayers and to donate water, food, hygiene products, diapers, and clothing. A number of collection points were opened at several Baptist churches to receive in-kind donations.

“We need a massive mobilization of Brazilian Baptists who are close to places affected to welcome our brothers in Christ,” a release from the Brazilian Baptist Convention stated. The Central Baptist Church in Teresópolis, one of the cities that suffered heavily, housed 37 persons who were displaced by the flooding.

Rio de Janeiro has been badly affected by a series of devastating floods in recent times. At least 85 people died in floods and mudslides in January 2010, and a further 212 deaths occurred in another flooding episode four months later, in April.
The origin of my people lies in the shadows of antiquity among the plains, mountains and rivers of India and even farther away. My family and most other Romá I know personally come from present-day Croatia and relocated around 1930 to Italy, where we have lived ever since.

I am the third generation of my family to be Italian. Nevertheless, we have not been able to integrate ourselves because of prejudice and racism. Every attempt to do so meets with disappointment. I remain unaccepted in this world, even though this world is my home. It feels like a continuous earthquake inside me. When will it end?

The situation grows worse. The police impose a census as an excuse to take the fingerprints of Romá children. The mass media instills fear in the society at large, saying that Romá children will all become delinquents, and, therefore, officials are allowed to implement this policy of terror. Officials order the dismantling of Romá camps. Bulldozers arrive driving out residents, causing men, women and children to flee with only the clothes on their backs. Those without Italian citizenship or documentation as workers are often deported—pushed out of Italy or other Western European countries where they hoped to build a future for their children.

Every day, unfortunately, we experience the results of this negative view of the Romá people—an approach that leaves us the least-recognized and most-misunderstood people in the world. While a Gagió (non-Romá) knows nothing of us and the roads we travel, we know not only the roads they travel, but also the side roads and their hidden secrets. If only the Gagió would get to know our culture with its social values and its many rituals of everyday life!

Of fundamental importance in our culture is respect for one’s parents and, in general, for all older people. Hospitality toward one’s neighbor is a must, and one must extend it on every occasion. We value a life without conflict, almost never entering into disputes with other families, because if one enters into disputes, one has a bad reputation among our people.

Our families are patriarchal. We believe in a united extended family, in abstinence before marriage, that marriage is for life, and in providing material assistance to those in need as we are able. When someone has lost a family member, we surround them and remain close to them. In the rare instance that a serious problem arises (e.g. marital problems or problems between families), those involved choose the oldest and wisest members of the families, and those selected meet together to resolve the problem. We seek in this way to resolve our problems without involving outside authorities, even while we respect and obey Italian systems and laws.
In most cases, we adopt the religion of the area in which we find ourselves (e.g. Romá Italians are almost all Catholics, while Romá from Romania are more often Eastern Orthodox. Romá in Muslim countries are Muslim). Within my circle of Romá-Italians, we greet each other (as well as the Gagió) with blessings like “God bless you,” “Go with God,” and “God be with you.”

It happens rarely that someone comes to us with open hands and an open heart, but when someone does, that person discovers that, among us Romá, there are many people who are affectionate, honest, respectful, humble, and who have dignity and an awareness of what is right and what is wrong. Yes, most Gagió think we do not even have an idea that “right” exists, but we remind them that the meaning of the word “Rom,” the name we call our race of people, means “human being” or “man” and that, therefore, Romá must be respected as any other group of human beings.

In June 2010 the Italian Baptist Union (UCEBI) organized a six-day camper drive visit to Roma camps in various Italian cities. The aim of the project was to further a better awareness of these people, reaffirm their human and civil rights, contribute to overcoming prejudice, make known the Romani culture, and also provide an opportunity for Baptist churches in Italy to meet groups of Roma people.

We live at a time in Italy when the principle of equality is at risk of being forgotten. Prejudice, particularly against Roma people but generally against foreigners, gives rise to suspicion, lack of trust, and separation, sentiments that lead to indifference. From this it is only a step to injustice, which can become blind and gratuitous violence. Italian Baptists wanted to make a contribution to break this perverse spiral, beginning with their own churches.

The six-day marathon began with the Venice Baptist Church welcoming a group of Evangelical Romani from their camp at Dolo in an atmosphere of joy and praise to the Lord with songs, prayers, testimonies and biblical comments.

I dream of the day in which we, created by God, will be accepted for who we are and not for who people think we are.

Commenting on Psalm 21, Rev. Emanuele Casalino prayed, “We ask for forgiveness if we have looked down on those who are different from us. O Lord, do not allow us to raise barriers: You have never excluded anyone.” The Roma representatives told of the bitter experience of being excluded. Elena Levak spoke of her fear when at night her house was unexpectedly and violently searched only because something untoward had happened in the neighborhood. “You don’t know us” said Cesare Levak, a Roma evangelist. “We know you, but you know next to nothing about us. These encounters are a start that can enable us to get to know each other better and overcome diffidence and suspicion.”

The second stop was organized in Turin by the Baptist churches in the area. Torrential rain was falling as the camper arrived at the community Il Dado, but a warm welcome awaited us. The building was painted yellow and looked cheerful and welcoming. On the wall of the house was a phrase in Italian, English and Romanian: “We defend our dreams, making them come true.” Today this

By Anna Maffei

Participants in the Italy Baptist Union six-day camper drive to visit Roma camps in several Italian cities

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community realizes its dream, hosting five Romani families, six Iranian refugees, a group of Somali asylum seekers, as well as two Italian families. In November 2006 a tragic event occurred in the town that gave birth to this place. An illegal Roma camp was burnt down and 250 people were left homeless. The bureaucratic obstacles did not discourage the volunteers from helping the families find shelter and regain their dignity. The municipality of Settimo Torinese, close to Turin, had a dilapidated building which had to be renovated. The renovation was done by the Roma themselves and now they live there, even hosting migrants and refugees.

Pastor Luigi Pecora led the evening in Turin where music alternated with testimonies. “It is raining outside,” he said, “and the little Romani settlement of huts along the River Po, not far from the Baptist Church of Moncalieri, is in danger, because the river could overflow at any time. If it were to happen those families would find a welcome in the church building, because some time ago a friendship started and this has changed us.”

The key note of the stop in Florence was “Pray carefully, be watchful devotedly, make plans hopefully.” Mercedes Frias, a Protestant and a former Member of Parliament, described the cultural background of the illegal and violent evacuation which took place on January 15, 2010, in the town of Sesto Fiorentino, when about 120 Romani, including newborn babies, children, pregnant women, someone in a wheelchair, and various elderly people, were evicted. Emergency shelter was offered by the Waldensian Church of Florence, which opened its doors to 85 of those evicted. This experience led to various plans for a more stable and organized presence in solidarity with Roma people in town.

The fifth stop of the camper was a visit to the Romani camp situated to the east of Rome, deep in the countryside where no public transportation is available. The delegation was greeted by a two-meter high metal fence with a gate controlled by a guard. We had to wait for two hours at the entrance. Even a mere visit from a friend to someone in the camp requires them to present a document at the so-called reception. Maybe there are good reasons for it, but it certainly gives the impression of two different worlds, two

Baptist World Magazine

Roma People in the United Kingdom

By Colin Rogers

It is estimated that there are 300,000 to 400,000 Gypsies and Travelers in the United Kingdom, of whom probably less than half are true Roma people. Roma (Romani or Gypsies) first settled in the UK more than 500 years ago as part of their “exodus” from Northern India – not Egypt as was formerly supposed and as the name “Gypsy” suggests.

Right from the start until today, the Roma people have been misunderstood and persecuted. The common perception of Gypsies, even amongst some Christians, is that they are dirty, lazy, liars, lawbreakers, unintelligent and violent criminals. While there are good and bad people in all societies, some of these perceptions are patently untrue. For example, Gypsies are not dirty; they have strict rules about food and personal hygiene. Proportionately, Gypsies commit fewer crimes than their gorgio (non-Gypsy) counterparts and it has been shown that, given the right circumstances, Gypsies are able students.

Whereas it was once common for Gypsies to travel all their working lives around the British Isles in their vardos (horse-drawn caravans) seeking seasonal employment, now some 50 percent of Gypsies live in brick-built houses or in park homes on permanent sites. Today Gypsy men tend to be self-employed manual workers, doing asphalt, block paving, tree surgery, plastic cladding, roofing, etc. Traditionally, Gypsy women earned their living going from house to house hawking (selling) carved hazel or willow pegs, or by dukkering (fortune-telling), etc. Nowadays, many of their occupations have died out, although some fortune-tellers are still found at fairs.

Baptists in Italy Reach Out to Romani continued

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While most people are aware that six million Jews died in the Holocaust, fewer are aware that some 250,000–500,000 Gypsies also died in this event that Romani call the “Porajmos” (devouring). While there are some similarities between Jews and Gypsies, there is one major difference; Jews have their own homeland, Israel, whereas Gypsies do not. This has given rise to numerous difficulties. It is illegal for Gypsies to stop in lay-bys, roadside parking or rest areas for drivers, and there are insufficient official sites for their trailers (caravans). Therefore Gypsies not only suffer personal, but also institutional, racism.

Another serious drawback is that itinerant Gypsies, in particular, find it difficult to gain access to medical or educational services. Many head teachers are reluctant to enroll Gypsies into their schools and the education system is simply not geared for Gypsy children. Many Gypsies marry and have children in their teens, so they leave school by age 13. Sex is a taboo subject for Gypsies, so the inclusion of sex education in schools is regarded as decadent.

Since the 1950s, a sovereign move of God has seen thousands of Gypsies becoming “born again” Christians. Because Gypsies keep to themselves and live on the edges of society, few people have heard about what is often called the “Silent Revival.” This revival reached the UK from France in the 1980s and is now continuing in 46 countries. Early converts were encouraged to join mainstream churches, but soon problems emerged. Gypsies often found the services incomprehensible and churches felt unable to cope with the flood of converts, some even closing their doors to Gypsies. Of necessity the Gypsies formed their own church, Life and Light Missions.

They have their own Bible College for training potential pastors, have 28 churches nationwide, and hold a convention, as well as numerous evangelistic missions, each year. Christian Gypsies are zealous evangelists and missionaries for which they are uniquely equipped in many ways – not least in having their own language, Romany, spoken by five million Gypsies worldwide. Gypsies firmly believe that they are the “by-ways” people mentioned in Jesus’ Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15-24.

There are numerous Christian organizations and individuals serving the Gypsies, including some Baptists. One such Baptist is Professor Thomas Acton OBE, who in 1998 became Britain’s first and only professor of Romani studies at Greenwich University.

I have had the privilege and joy both of ministering to Gypsies and of receiving ministry from Gypsies. A few years ago I was rushed into the hospital seriously ill. My very first visitors were five Gypsy leaders who travelled 50 miles (80 km) to gather around my bedside. In true Gypsy fashion they all prayed out loud at the same time: the effect on the other patients and nurses was electric! As one young Christian nurse said to me afterwards, “I have never heard prayer like that!”

If one is to reach out hands of friendship and build bridges between Gypsies and gorgios, it will require patience and perseverance to build up mutual trust. Above all, one must not lord over them but, in humility, recognize them as brothers and sisters for whom Christ died and emulate our Master who came “not to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28).

Colin Rogers is a retired Baptist minister in the United Kingdom.
Speaking of the Roma in our country, France, requires precision. We use the term “Roma” for two different populations, which poses specific problems for each group.

First are “The Travelers.” This is a diverse population, such as the Manouches who are originally from Central Europe and the Gypsies from South Spain. Most are of French nationality. The Travelers are characterized both by their cultural specificity (in particular their culture of travel) and their mobile homes or caravans. There are approximately 400,000 Travelers in France, and a quarter of them are of the evangelical confession.

Since the European Union was enlarged, “Roma migrants” from Central and Eastern Europe have come to France to flee economic and social difficulties, such as discrimination, in their countries. This group is estimated at approximately 10,000 people and is distinct from the Travelers.

Their presence in France poses a number of questions and challenges regarding the application of legal texts, which are poorly adapted to their situations, including rules of the freedom of movement, residency, asylum, and more generally, the rights of aliens. It is difficult and sometimes impossible for these “Roma migrants” to obtain employment, which leads to precarious living conditions such as extreme poverty, subsistence income, a resorting to begging, substandard housing (slums, illegal camps, etc.), lack of access to social rights, health problems, and the list goes on. This has led to a policy of deportation by the government under conditions that are often criticized as immoral and even illegal, as outlined by the European Commission.

What are the churches doing? We would be greatly tempted to answer “Nothing” or “Almost nothing.” There are, however, Christian and other groups that act on a local level, particularly in emergency situations, but these are mostly small groups with little impact.

On a national level, Christian charities involved in the painful problems of immigration in our country came together in a Christian grouping of the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid (FEP) and Catholic Assistance (“Secours Catholique”). The Baptist Association for Mutual Aid and Youth is involved through the FEP.

This group is working on several fronts: Protesting unjust policies, particularly the tightening of legislation on liability; sensitizing people in our churches through the publication of several documents; and training in how to respond in specific situations and how to be welcoming to undocumented immigrants.

Though these actions have been taken, many are still not fully aware of their social, biblical and theological responsibility to welcome the stranger.

The Gypsy Evangelical Mission of France (GEMF) is a member of the Protestant Federation and the Association Life and Light (Vie et Lumière). The GEMF plays an important role in the defense of the Roma’s strong cultural identity and their claims for the same civil rights as any French citizen, including freedom of movement and settlement, schooling for their children, voting rights, and their fight against discrimination.

Alain Brabant is president of the Baptist Association for Aid and Youth in France
John Peterson

John Peterson, a former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), died on March 22 in Alexandria, Virginia, in the United States. He was 76 years old.

Peterson, pastor of the Alfred Street Baptist Church (ASBC) in Alexandria from 1964 until his retirement in 2006, served the BWA in various capacities, including as vice president and as member of the General Council, the Executive Committee, the Personnel Committee, the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, and the Promotion and Development Committee.

He is a former chair of the Budget and Finance Committee and was the first chair of the BWA Special Commission on Baptists Against Racism from 1990-1995. This commission helped to plan a major anti-racism summit in Atlanta, Georgia, in January 1999.

“Peterson was deeply committed to the Baptist World Alliance, with whose mission he identified wholeheartedly, in whose leadership he shared his outstanding gifts, and of whose program he led his church to be a strong supporter,” said BWA General Secretary Neville Callam.

“As chair of the Budget and Finance Committee he played a significant role in helping us to negotiate the purchase of our new headquarters building in Falls Church, Virginia,” said Denton Lotz, former general secretary of the BWA.

During the civil wars in Liberia that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, Peterson represented the BWA in negotiating with the rebels for the return of several Baptist properties that the rebels had confiscated, including Rick’s Institute, a Baptist school in Monrovia, Liberia’s capital.

Peterson was engaged in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and played a role in helping to integrate schools in Alexandria, a suburb in the greater Washington, DC, metropolitan area. “Schools had to be integrated forcefully. That was a terrible time. I worked very closely with the integration of schools,” Peterson said in an interview following his retirement. He was deeply involved in a number of other organizations, including the Northern Virginia Urban League.

ASBC experienced significant growth during Peterson’s tenure as pastor, from fewer than 200 to approximately 2,400 members. The congregation hosts an annual college fair and provides a significant number of scholarships to college-bound students. The church became mission focused, with various ministries to the wider Alexandria community, including a jail and prison ministry. Mission outreach was extended to other countries, such as to Liberia in West Africa.

Under Peterson, ASBC established or strengthened links with the Baptist General Convention of Virginia, the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention and the BWA. A number of ASBC members are on the staff of the BWA or have served on committees and commissions.

“As pastor of several BWA staff members and other persons who hold significant offices in the BWA, Peterson extended his pastoral care to cover the entire BWA staff in generous and memorable ways,” Callam stated. “We thank God for his life and witness; we celebrate his faithfulness in ministry; and we commend his example to everyone.”

Peterson leaves wife, Joyce, son, John Jr., and daughter, Jewelette.

A private memorial service will be held at ASBC on April 1 and a funeral service on April 2.

Christine Gregory

a former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, died on January 22 in Danville, Virginia, in the United States. She was 89 years old.

Gregory was vice president of the BWA from 1985-1990 and served on the General Council and Executive Committee.

She was elected first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1981, the first woman to fill one of the SBC’s top elected positions, and in 1982 became the first woman to serve as president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

In the 1970s, she was president of the SBC’s Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) and of WMU’s Virginia affiliate. She was a trustee of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and was awarded honorary doctorates by two schools with historic Baptists ties - the University of Richmond and Averett College (now University) in Danville, both in Virginia.

Gregory, whose husband died in 1994, is survived by sons Harrison, Eugene and Joel.

A memorial service was held at First Baptist Church in Danville on January 30.
Gustavo Parajón

recipient of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Human Rights Award in 2006, and a former vice president of the BWA, died on March 13 in Managua, Nicaragua, of a heart attack. He was 75 years old.

A medical doctor and former pastor of First Baptist Church in Managua, Nicaragua’s capital, Parajón was a prominent figure in Nicaraguan evangelical and medical circles. The son of pastor and church planter Arturo Parajón, he graduated from Case Western Reserve University Medical School in Cleveland, Ohio, in the United States, and earned a Masters in Public Health from Harvard University in Massachusetts.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam stated that “Gustavo was an exemplary leader among us” who had an outstanding “record of service in defense of justice and peace.” Callam said that the BWA has been “inspired by his commitment to serving the needy, healing the wounded and uniting Christians in the service of people in need.”

Parajón founded two organizations. PROVADENIC (Nicaragua Vaccination and Community Development Program), formed in 1967, was started in partnership with the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua, First Baptist Church of Managua, and First Baptist Church of Cleveland in the USA. It is a primary healthcare program that serves 25 rural communities by training local health promoters to treat and prevent common illnesses.

CEPAD (Nicaraguan Council of Evangelical Churches) was created in 1972 as an interdenominational relief organization to aid victims after an earthquake severely damaged Managua and other parts of the country, killing more than 10,000. CEPAD has expanded its ministry and now serves approximately 45 member denominations and the broader population with emergency relief, development, and reconciliation programs.

During the Sandinista Revolution and the war in the 1980s, CEPAD was the intermediary between the evangelical churches and the government, and won the attention of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, who appointed Parajón a member of the National Reconciliation Commission, together with Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Managua.

This appointment led to misrepresentation in some circles that CEPAD was a communist organization working in tandem with the Soviet-backed government. As a result, CEPAD's clinics became targets for attacks from Contra rebels who sought to overthrow the government, placing doctors, nurses and patients at risk. An intervention by Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (now Palmer Theological Seminary) professor and author, Ron Sider, who organized visits by conservative leaders from the USA to the sites served by the organization, helped to dispel the accusation. CEPAD continues its ministry of reconciliation.

Parajón received several other awards, including the Francisco Morazán medallion in October 2006 from the Central American Parliament; the Sesquicentennial Medallion as an Outstanding Citizen of Managua during Managua’s 150th anniversary in 2002; the Dahlberg Peace Award by American Baptist Churches USA in 1980; and a Doctor of Humane Letters degree in 1981 from Denison University in Granville, Ohio, from where he had previously earned his bachelor’s degree in 1959.

In receiving the 2006 BWA Human Rights Award, Parajón, who served as a BWA vice president from 2005-2010, was recognized for his outstanding peace, relief and development work, as well as his contribution to the evangelical movement and Baptist witness in his country.

General Secretary Callam declared that Parajón’s “dedication to reconciling people in situations of conflict has inspired us all. Gustavo has left us with a legacy of a loving and caring spirit which Baptists everywhere will seek to emulate.”

Parajón leaves wife, Joan, daughters, Marta and Rebecca, and son, David.

Funeral services were held March 15 in Managua.

In Memoriam continued

Paul Madsen

a former executive assistant to the general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, died on November 19, 2010, in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, in the United States. He was 90 years old.

Madsen’s involvement with the BWA began in the early 1970s while he was associate executive secretary of the Division of Church Missions of American Baptist Home Mission Societies. He was a member of the BWA General Council, the Executive Committee, the Commission on Evangelism and Missions, and chair of the Personnel Committee.

In the mid-1980s, Madsen was named executive assistant to BWA General Secretary Gerhard Claas, and helped in the planning of the 1985 Baptist World Congress in Los Angeles, California, in the USA, where he was in charge of the BWA exhibit, and the 1990 congress in Seoul, South Korea.

Madsen was the author of several books including The Small Church: Valid, Vital, Victorious; The Person Who Chairs the Meeting; and The Continuing Journey: 1832, 1878, 1974: The Mission of the Board of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.
Standing Taller as a Baptist

After the General Council met in Ede, Netherlands, in 2009, several of us spent a day or two in Amsterdam. One of those days was spent touring the Rembrandt museum viewing a digitized collection of all of his paintings. There was one picture that caught my attention.

Your gaze was drawn to the top left corner of the painting. The man’s left fist was tightly clenched; his neck was stiff; and his torso was coiled for delivering another blow with the whip of cords gripped in his strong right hand. His brow was furrowed; his jaw was set; and his mouth was angrily downturned.

But it was mostly his eyes which captivated you. They seemed to cut into the souls of the people who were fleeing his anger. Piercing eyes. Eyes full of anger and pain and intensity of purpose. Those eyes were passionate eyes, eyes which reflected the depths of the man’s soul.

They were the eyes of Jesus; Jesus in the moment of exploding anger against the injustice of the moneychangers and merchants. Rembrandt had frozen that powerful moment on his canvas, visualizing the depth of Jesus’ emotions. Those were not the familiar eyes of Jesus that are generally painted as soft and harmless eyes, the eyes of one who seeks otherworldly bliss. No, Rembrandt captured the passion of the moment. And somehow as you looked at those eyes you knew they were true to who Jesus was and true to the sort of people Jesus calls us to be.

Of course, Jesus was not calling attention to himself in the temple that day. He was reclaiming for the Gentiles their place of worship. It is stated abundantly clearly in the Gospels, “My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations but you have made it a den of thieves.” Jesus was objecting passionately to their insensitivity to the spiritual needs of Gentiles, who had lost their only place of worship due to the needs of the marketplace. Supply and demand had run rough-shod over spiritual well-being.

These past few months as president of the BWA have been months of learning and visiting people who have cultivated that kind of passionate faith. Just as I looked into the eyes of Jesus in that painting I have looked into the eyes of many who have stood tall in the face of much anguish in the world.

And when I have looked into the eyes of my brothers and sisters I have seen the heart of God. I have seen passionate love for God and passionate love for God’s people. They have not been the eyes of passive individuals who think faith is a nice idea. They have been the eyes of deep love and passion. They have been the eyes with outreaching arms, an open heart, with feet ready for action and response. They have been the eyes of love, not sentimental, not judgmental, not self-serving, not private versions of love. They have been the eyes of God’s love. Some have been the eyes of sparking anger when “the least of these” have been mistreated. They have been tear-filled eyes for God’s little ones who grieve. They have been understanding eyes for those who are confused. They have been the eyes of hope for those who are despairing. It has been a joy to look into their eyes. It makes me want to stand taller, speak more boldly, square my shoulders with more determination, and to reach out with greater empathy.

These past few months have taken me to Central America, across the United States, and to a visit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon. These past several months have revealed story after story of the peacekeeping nature of many of God’s most faithful servants. I have seen this from the Baptists who have lived through apartheid in South Africa to the reconciliation work of giants like Gustavo Parajon of Nicaragua. BWA First Vice President Daniel Carro and I had the opportunity to attend the Baptist Convention of Panama’s annual session. Daniel was the keynote speaker and was both profound and inspirational. I learned of Baptists in Nicaragua taking health care to the jungles of Central America. It was moving to see two medical doctors serving as missionaries of the ABC/USA. They could have lucrative practices back home, but their joy comes in seeing villages building latrines and homes making their own water filter for safe drinking and bathing. These doctors are members of BWA Vice President Joel Sierra’s congregation.

After spending time with some of our courageous leaders in Baptist life and hearing world leaders express their appreciation for the BWA, it makes me want to remind Baptists that there is much for which to be thankful. In a time when it is easy to be discouraged about Kingdom work or disheartened about the conditions of the world, I have found my spirit renewed and lifted by seeing the broader and substantial work many are doing. I wish that same sense of assurance for all in the BWA.
BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE

Baptist World Alliance Day
April 30 – May 1, 2011

“Hear the Spirit – Proclamation”

Be a part of Baptists around the world celebrating and praying for the global Baptist family!
Join the Baptist family in worship together.
Resources for worship will be on our website, in many languages.
For more information visit www.bwanet.org or email us—bwa@bwanet.org