Living Water for St. Petersburg, Russia, on the shores of the Baltic Sea.

See pages 8–9 inside.
Meet the New Advancement Team

It is a privilege to serve the Baptist World Alliance during these critical days as the Director of Advancement. Along with my colleagues, ElizaBeth Wright, Associate Director of Development, and incoming Associate Director of Communications Eron Henry, we represent the Advancement Leadership Team at BWA. We are, of course, supported by some wonderful in-house colleagues and staff members who comprise our support team.

Over the next few months you will notice several new initiatives related to advancing the mission of the Baptist World Alliance. These include a new e-newsletter that will provide more current and updated information on the happenings on the advancement front along with other general news of Baptist events around the world. Combined with an intensive effort to provide constantly updated information on our BWA website, we hope to bring you in touch with the many areas of our world where BWA is literally ‘First Feet on the Ground’ in support of those in need. In addition, we are moving aggressively forward to provide estate planning services for the many folks in our constituency who wish to make gifts from their estate plan to BWA. You will be receiving information about this effort as this program unfolds. Finally, we are putting into place a plan to secure the financial funding of the many needs of BWA. We are blessed with a vibrant and generous base of supporters who believe in our mission and purpose. We hope to present to all potential donors the riveting and compelling BWA story, and to do so in such a way that many more will respond with gifts of generosity to our cause.

These are days of enormous challenge for our many Baptist colleagues around the world. The only Baptist organization charged with the mission of networking them all together and representing their needs is the Baptist World Alliance. Please join me in helping to advance this noble and worthwhile mission.

(Ron Harris, Director of Advancement)
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A New BWA Century Begins!


As we enter this new BWA century, we need to ask ourselves important questions: Where are we going? What inspires us from the past that will continue to give vision for the future? What are those structures that need to be renewed or discarded? How can we truly be a world organization in spite of the economic inequities of our countries and member bodies? These are questions that the 21st Century Committee requested the General Council to consider. Our new BWA president, David Coffey, has appointed an Implementation Task Force that has already had two meetings and is doing significant study to make the BWA an even more effective Baptist movement in our new century!

The following thoughts will help us as we anticipate positive change in our new quinquennium:

1. The Positive Vision of the Past: “The Baptist World Alliance…exists as an expression of the essential oneness of Baptist people in the Lord Jesus Christ.” This preamble to the BWA Constitution makes clear what the BWA is all about!

   a. “Essential Oneness”: The prayer of Jesus in John 17 “that they may all be one” is a missional prayer. Jesus is praying to the Father for the unity of His people so that the Gospel will be proclaimed and received. Unity throughout the Bible is a constant thread. It is a doctrine found in the heart of God. The trinity is the expression of the unity of the Godhead and also a call to Christians to be united. The BWA exists on a world level to witness to the world of that unity that diverse Baptists have in Jesus Christ. This will always be our main vision.

   b. “Baptist People”: The BWA acknowledges that there are many Christian groups whom God is using to build His kingdom worldwide. However, the mission of the BWA is concerned primarily with the Baptist expression of that universal faith in Jesus Christ. In 2009 we will celebrate the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the modern Baptist movement in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Through its commissions and committees the BWA offers Baptists worldwide an opportunity to rediscover and strengthen their Baptist roots and together seek the will of God for new avenues of mission.

   c. “In the Lord Jesus Christ”: The center of all that we are and hope to be is Jesus Christ. We point not to ourselves, nor to our history. As essential to our Trinitarian faith we point to Jesus Christ, very God and very man, as our Savior and Redeemer. We preach Christ and we are part of His mission to redeem the world for His coming Kingdom and look forward to that day when the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of Christ!

2. Realizing the Vision for the 21st Century: God does not change, but church history has shown that Christian perceptions of the nature of the church do change. As we enter the 21st century Baptist people worldwide need to ask searching questions as to the nature of the church and its mission in the world today. In a world of multi-culturalism, secularism, the clash of civilizations, and the extension of the church to the Southern hemisphere our theology and structures of the 19th century will not meet the challenges of tomorrow. Therefore, we need to ask piercing questions and pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us on the paths of righteousness for the new day which God in Christ that has prepared for us!

   Essential Questions for a new vision: As we seek a new vision for Baptist witness worldwide we need to seek answers to difficult questions: What is the nature of the Church? What structures inhibit and what structures project God’s mission in today’s world? How do we change to involve all the people of God? How will BWA member bodies relate to one another? What is the role of the local church and individuals in the mission of the BWA? How do we fund this new vision? Who are the emerging leaders? How can we provide a platform for them to realize their potential? What are the structural implications of the paradigm shift of mission from the North to the South? How does the Baptist concept of local autonomy relate to interdependence?

   Indeed the second century of the BWA has begun. We need your prayers, encouragement and support. By Christ’s guidance and the power of the Spirit the BWA will become an even more significant instrument of God in uniting and sending out Baptists on mission to the whole world! May that be our prayer!

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY
Denton Lotz
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the new President of Liberia and the first woman President on the African continent won a run off election on November 8, 2005, by a large margin over soccer star George Weah.

That’s why there were long lines of Liberians, old and young, waiting patiently to cast their votes on October 11.

MONROVIA, LIBERIA: Long lines of eager voters began to form at three o’clock in the morning. This was the first time in years that Liberia had a free election. Civil war had decimated the country. More than two hundred thousand people had been killed in a war that saw Liberia descend from one of the most democratic countries in Africa to a country with no infrastructure, no economy, and no ability to sustain itself. The UN had brokered an end to the fighting warlords and subsequently basically ruled the country and provided sustenance to the people. But now, at last, the people were allowed to begin political parties and to elect a new president and parliamentarians.

That’s why there were long lines of Liberians, old and young, waiting to vote early Tuesday morning, October 11th. The Liberian people had said no to violence and war and now were praying that democracy would bring a stable government that would turn things around and create an atmosphere of peace so that prosperity could return to this beautiful country. Ever since the assassination of the former President William Tolbert in 1980, Liberia has suffered from civil unrest and war. Tolbert, who had served as BWA president from 1965-70, is now revered as a great leader. His grave has been appropriately decorated. It was wonderful to see two
The Liberian people said no to violence and war, praying that democracy would bring a stable government.

...of Tolbert’s children, William Tolbert Jr. and Christine Tolbert Norman, both committed Baptists and very involved in reconstruction and peace efforts.

In the days before the elections there were huge political rallies. Thousands marched in the streets and assembled to support and hear their candidate. There was a sense of excitement in the air. No more war! No more violence! Peace and prosperity were the themes of all candidates. With 22 candidates running for president the people certainly had a choice; perhaps too much of a choice! In the end there were three leading candidates: the famous soccer player, George Weah, a United Nations leader and former Liberian government minister, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and an exiled Liberian lawyer, Charles Brumskine. The world famous soccer player seemed to catch the imagination and enthusiasm of the young people. Their attitude was that the older generation has let us down; let’s go for a famous athlete. The older generation seemed to be saying we need someone who is experienced in government affairs and can lead us into re-construction and deal with the corruption and political atrocities of the past. We need to pray for the new government which will take office on January 16, 2006.

The question remains: Will Liberia be able to re-build itself and become a model democratic country? Or, will political and tribal factions again begin to quarrel and bring disharmony? The people who waited in long lines to vote obviously were sick of war and destruction and wanted peace.

The Baptist World Alliance had been invited to be an Official Observer at this election. Representatives of the BWA were: the General Secretary, Denton Lotz, the Director of the Youth Department, Emmett Dunn, and the BWA Regional Secretary for Africa, Frank Adams. Former US President Jimmy Carter also led a delegation of government leaders as observers. We visited about

The Baptist World Alliance was invited to be an Official Observer at the election. Former US President Jimmy Carter also led a delegation of government leaders as observers.

(Left to right): Frank Adams, BWA Regional Secretary for Africa; Olu Menjay, Principal of Ricks Institute; Emmett Dunn, BWA Youth Director; and Denton Lotz, BWA General Secretary, official observers at the election.
nine polling stations. The election was well planned and organized. In fact, it may have been too organized in that older people complained that they had to wait in line sometimes for twelve hours. Eligible voters had registered last April and were given a voter registration identification card which then entitled them to vote. A voter’s registration list with a picture of each voter had been prepared and then compared with the voter ID card. This took a long time, especially when one saw the lines of thousands of people waiting to vote. But, there was a certain excitement and expectancy which caused the people to be very patient.

It was a joy on the Sunday evening before the election to participate in a special service of prayer for the country of Liberia. We met with Baptist leaders in the Providence Baptist Church, where the country of Liberia, led by former slaves from the USA, declared their independence more than 150 years ago.

Very often conflicts in the political realm are also mirrored in the church. Unfortunately this has been the problem within the Baptist leadership. The president of the Liberian Baptists was impeached by the Executive Committee because he had become one of the vice presidential candidates, which Liberian Baptist rules prohibit. Furthermore, as often happens in Baptist life, there are no clear boundaries or guidelines between the role of the president and the general secretary. Traditionally the president’s role has been ceremonial and that of the general secretary administrative and executive. When these boundaries are not recognized conflict results. Unfortunately, this has been the case among Liberian Baptists. Pray for General Secretary Emile Sam Peale and the new Baptist President, Rev. Joseph Johnson, that they may be able to bring reconciliation to the country and to the convention! We are grateful to Emile Sam Peale and his excellent leadership during these difficult days. His presence with us at the polling stations made the whole experience a positive one.

On the way to the airport for our departure, we visited the Baptist Seminary and were pleased to participate in a service of worship with the students. All through the war the seminary was protected and later had been used by UN troops as a base. Now life is returning to normal and more than 120 students are preparing to minister in a new and free Liberia, aware of all the problems that entails! Lincoln Brownell, the president of the seminary, presented the BWA with a beautiful engraved wooden plaque thanking the BWA for its support during the years of suffering. Let us continue to pray that these students will become visionary and prophetic leaders of the more than 300 churches and 75,000 Liberian Baptists! Pray for the leadership of Baptists in Liberia!
As we enter the 21st century, the Baptist World Alliance Congress deliberately chose the theme of “Jesus Christ: Living Water” as a challenge for Baptist conventions and unions worldwide to take up the missionary and evangelistic zeal of the early movement and to continue to evangelize the world in this generation.

In order to fulfill this challenge, we were pleased that two donors gave significant contributions that enabled us to plan a strategy of world evangelization called, “Living Water.” There are three parts to this strategy. One is holding Living Water conferences worldwide (a report of the first one held in St. Petersburg follows.) We are pleased that Tony Cupit will coordinate the conferences. The second aspect of the Living Water strategy is that the Director of Evangelism and Education, Fausto Vasconcelos, will work with member bodies worldwide to encourage every convention/union and church to become an evangelizing community and to teach its people to pray and work for winning souls for Christ. A third part of the strategy is for the Baptist World Alliance and the General Secretary’s office to call Baptists worldwide to prayer and celebration of the evangelistic task before us.

The first Living Water conference held in St. Petersburg was an encouragement for all of us. The BWA believes Living Water strategy must be personalized for every Baptist, every church and every union and convention worldwide so that Christ will be known among the nations! Pray that your church also will become involved in being a missionary and evangelizing community of faith. To God be the glory!

Denton Lotz

St. Petersburg Living Water Conference
October 18-20, 2005
by Tony Cupit

“The background was dark, the future is light.”

These are the words of Andrew Fomenko, student-pastor from Russia serving as a missionary in Donensk, Ukraine with his wife Tanya. Andrew spoke of his acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior when a Baptist brother visited him in prison 12 years ago and witnessed to him of his need for Christ’s love in his life. He had two separate four year periods in prison. Today, it is hard to imagine this quietly spoken and committed disciple having a criminal background. His life has been transformed by the presence of Jesus Christ in his life.

The Living Water conference in St Petersburg was the first time Andrew and Tanya had the opportunity to attend an international conference and they loved it. They declared that they wished it would not end! To attend they had to travel for two full days by train but for them this was a small price to pay.

The coastal strip of the Baltic Sea, 50 miles from St Petersburg, Russia, was the venue of the first of ten proposed Living Water conferences, and the Moskoi Priboi guest-house was full with 250 delegates and
another fifty day visitors. Baptist leaders from nearly every country in Russian-speaking Eastern Europe attended. A number came from countries like Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan where Christians face constant oppression and harassment.

The conference began Tuesday afternoon with a strong biblical message from John’s Gospel, chapter 7, by Russian leader Yuri Sipko and ended on Thursday evening with a wonderfully inspirational sermon from Revelation 7 by pastor/evangelist, Ronald Bobo from St Louis, Missouri. In the two and a half days, delegates heard stirring messages on the theme, “Jesus Christ, Living Water” from other leaders, Alexander Gonchearuk (Moldova) and Slavic Nesteruk (Ukraine). They were supported by messages from Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of US evangelist, Billy Graham, and Dennis Pethers, Baptist evangelist from London, UK.

Because there is a strong relationship between effective evangelism and good leadership, these two streams were emphasized through major papers and workshops. Some subjects on leadership explored were “Jesus Christ; Servant Leader;” “The Marks of the Good Pastor;” “Introduction to Conflict Resolution;” and “Spiritual Formation and leadership.”

Other messages on evangelism and mission included, “God is a Missionary God;” “How to Plant a New Church;” “The Importance of Evangelistic Ministry;” and “How to Do Effective Mission Work.” The General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Azerbaijan, Elnur Jabiyev, was one who spoke in a workshop of his harrowing experiences in starting and seeking to strengthen new congregations in the hinterland of Azerbaijan, a country hostile to the spread of the Gospel. Jabiyev has encountered severe persecution as a young Christian but has an unswerving dedication to the Savior who died on a Cross so that he might live. He spoke of the encouragement it was to him to come to a meeting like the Living Water Conference and to realize that he is not alone in ministry but has many co-laborers serving Christ in challenging environments.

Workshops provided opportunity for the delegates to discuss and bring input to the subjects and some of the comments and questions were very penetrative! A major paper offered by EBF General Secretary Tony Peck explored the theme, “The Missionary Nature of the Church,” and an international panel responded with insights from their own context. Dynamic Russian youth leader, Evgeny Bakhmoski, gathered all of the younger contingent together to explore the potential of youth for the future of the spread of the gospel throughout Eastern Europe. He asserted that young people should not wait, but make their ministries available, believing that “young people are not the church of tomorrow but the church of today!”

The Baptist World Alliance was represented by its President, David Coffey, General Secretary, Denton Lotz, and Special Assistant and former BWA Director, Ian Chapman. Tony Cupit, BWA’s Living Water Coordinator, organized the conference with invaluable support from Peter Miskevitch, Russian Baptist Union’s Vice-President, and EBF leader Daniel Trusciewicz from Poland among others.

Music of great variety and power was led by the master of the music ministries in the Central Baptist Church in St Petersburg, Vladimir Kashalaba, with three of his young people’s choirs from the church, including a superb hand-bell choir, and by a trio from Virginia, led by former missionary in Europe, Jerry Jones. Students of the St Petersburg Christian University were prominent in the composition of the choirs. Spontaneous singing by the Armenian delegation, among others, revealed both the talent present and the rich ethnic mix of Baptist people from throughout Eastern Europe.

In a quiet moment of personal reflection after the concluding message, all participants received a covenant card to complete and place in their Bibles reminding them of the promises made. Among these promises were:

1. To daily drink from the well of water of which Jesus Christ is the source.
2. To always see Christ in the people of their congregation and act towards them as a true shepherd of the Lord and of people.
3. To pray daily for the lost people in their community and to witness about Christ to at least one person each day.
4. To do at least one act of kindness daily, one “good work” in the name of Jesus.
5. To be a servant/leader offering Christ the Living Water that others may come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

To God be the glory.
What is the Baptist World Alliance?

The Baptist World Alliance is a global movement of Baptists sharing a common confession of faith in Jesus Christ, bonded together by God’s love to support, encourage and strengthen one another, while proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to a lost and hurting world.

The Baptist World Alliance is a fellowship of 214 Baptist unions and conventions comprising a membership of 35 million baptized believers and a community of more than 100 million Baptists worldwide. The BWA unites Baptists around the world, leads in world evangelism, responds to people in need and defends human rights.

Why Be a Member of the BWA?

- Become part of the BWA Network which connects the Baptist family around the world.
- Expand its vision of God’s work around the world.
- Increase its ministry opportunities with overseas churches.
- Impact lives around the world by supporting the ministries of the BWA.
- Provide leadership at worldwide training events.
- Provide financial support to train national leaders.
- Support indigenous missionaries to spread the Gospel of Christ.
- Receive invitations to do hands-on ministry.
- Help the BWA fight for religious freedom and human rights.

What Do We Believe?

The BWA affirms the historic doctrines of the Christian faith as proclaimed in Holy Scripture, the authoritative Word of God.

Our affirmation to these historic doctrines includes, but is not limited to:

- The uniqueness of Jesus Christ,
- Salvation through Jesus Christ alone,
- The centrality of the Great Commission,
- Biblical standards of personal and social morality.
Led by the Rev. Gilberto Gutierrez, President of the Baptist Convention of Mexico, Mexican Baptists are preparing with arms open wide to receive the BWA General Council and committee and commission members next July 2–8, 2006 in Mexico City.

This will be a great opportunity for Baptists of the world to experience the spiritual dynamic and enthusiastic worship of Baptists of Mexico. With 150,000 baptized believers, Baptists of Mexico represent the largest Spanish-speaking Baptist convention of the world. Their 1,500 churches represent the spectrum of Baptist life from often poverty-ridden rural areas to sophisticated and wealthy urban churches. The worshipping community of Baptists in Mexico, including children and family members, is more than 500,000!

Located south of the border of the USA, Baptists of Mexico are very much a part of Latin American Baptist life. They enjoy good relations with their English-speaking neighbors to the north, especially Texas Baptists, but their culture, view of life, and theology is very much oriented towards their brothers and sisters in Latin America. Although geographically part of North America, Baptists of Mexico voted to withdraw from the North American Baptist Fellowship 20 years ago and join the Union of Baptists of Latin America, with whom they share a common language and culture.

Baptists of the world have much to learn from Baptists of Mexico. They suffer as a minority group of believers who have not always had government support. As a minority, the majority church in the country has often looked down upon them and considered them sectarian. However, in recent years Baptists in Mexico have gained the respect of the government and there is real growth. They serve the people of Mexico with their clinics, hospitals, seminaries and pastoral concern for the people.

The president, Rev. Gilberto Gutierrez, is also pastor of Mt. Horeb Baptist Church, where Dr. and Mrs. Rolando and Edna Lee Gutierrez formerly served. The Church has 1,200 members and three worship services on Sunday morning. Their enthusiastic youth group, serious Bible study groups and contemporary worship are all part of the reason for their strong growth in recent years. While worshipping with Mt. Horeb Baptist Church last month special prayers were offered for Edna Lee Gutierrez who has been hospitalized and is in serious condition.

General Council, committee, and commission members are encouraged to make their plans early to attend the first general council meeting of this quinquennium. Our new BWA President, David Coffey, joins us in extending thanks to Mexican Baptists and offers a word of encouragement for BWA members to plan now to come to Mexico in 2006!
I HAVE JUST RETURNED from a HIV/AIDS conference hosted by Rick and Kay Warren at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest California where I witnessed a radical change in the way the evangelical community is now being asked to address this pandemic that is sweeping the world and has engulfed the continent of Africa.

Putting their worldwide credibility on the line as they lead the way in a new response to this worldwide plague, the Warrens, Bill and Lynne Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois, and other outstanding evangelical leaders are calling on their sisters and brothers, to join this fight against HIV/AIDS.

When I speak about change, I include myself. There I was, one of the 1,700 people at the conference, embracing all kinds of people who now live with the disease. Among that group were former homosexuals, hemophiliacs, a couple whose lives were those of picture-perfect conservative Christians and all others, tied together by this disease. A year ago, I could not imagine myself in this group.

Rick and Kay Warren emphasized that it does not matter how you got the disease. They are firm about the Biblical call to a holy and Christian lifestyle, but they point out the Scriptural truth that “all have sinned and come short of God’s glory, God loves all, Jesus showed loved to every kind if sinner and died to redeem all sinners.

When faced with human need and suffering, the question we must ask is, “what is our response as Christians? How can we care and love as Jesus did?

I remembered the chaplain at Living Hope Community Ministries in Cape Town, South Africa who said the same thing to me. “I do not ask them how they got AIDS,” she said, “I just give them hope.”

Last October as I sat on the South African Airways jumbo jet speeding towards Cape Town, a photograph in the South African newspaper caught my attention. It was a prize winning picture of a young woman in the last moments of her life before she died from HIV/AIDS, three days after the shot was captured.

Taken in a very impoverished place, the woman lies on a mattress with a blanket at her side, her face cradled in her hands. It is her eyes however that are the focal point of the picture, titled, “The Last Image of a Dying Hero.” The photographer chose that picture because he said, “It poignantly frames the effects of AIDS and symbolizes consequential isolation, desperation, loneliness, abandonment and the gaze of hopelessness and probably death.”

Why was that woman called a hero? “She was one of only three people to declare her HIV status in a town where the fear of being ostracized means most of the ill refuse to be tested and suffer alone.”

So many factors contribute to the spread of this disease which is rampant throughout the African continent. Poverty, lack of education, culture and lifestyle, and shame, intertwine to make it a huge challenge not only for the government, but now for the Christian churches in South Africa.

Current estimates show about 6.3 million of South Africa’s 47 million citizens are infected with the HIV virus, up from an estimated 5.3 million in 2003.

Fifty percent of these patients are women and most of the people I met with the virus were women.

As our team enters the doorway of a tiny shop in one of the former townships, a cheery voice on the radio sings “good morning, good morning.” I learn later that is the start of the government’s radio lessons for children for the day, but the house is anything but cheery.

The storefront shop has some of everything; onions, potatoes, tomatoes, flour, cosmetics, creams, cleaning supplies. We dip under the counter and go inside, pass an
open toilet and some beds, and go to a young woman with HIV/AIDS.

She sits in a chair, drinking from a red plastic cup, unable to talk too much, except for her biggest worry. “What is going to happen to my child,” she says. Her son is seven years old. The nurse encourages her to go to the hospital and we take her there.

Her cry is one that I heard many times from the women, “what will happen to my children.”

On another day, I drive up a mountain with a million-dollar view of the Indian Ocean pounding against the rocks, but when we park the car at the bottom of a hill and trudge up the muddy pathway to the shanties that make up a little community or village, it is again the women with the disease who meet us.

That day as the nurse takes her blood pressure I ask myself, if Christian compassion is not given to this woman, who will care? I learned that it can take between five and seven years before someone gets sick with the virus and because of this the rate of infection rises as people who appear to be healthy continue to spread the disease. For the women this condition means that they must continue to sleep with their husbands or boy friends. Young girls are vulnerable because of the myth that if an infected man sleeps with an uninfected woman or virgin he will be cured, and virgins get younger and younger.

In almost every case, poverty puts you at great risk. One woman wanted a cell phone and she was willing to accommodate a man who promised to give it to her, but in the end she lost her life.

As I sat and listened to a group of women living with this disease talk about their emotions, I was struck by their faith in Jesus Christ and the hope of the Gospel, but they were also so sad and depressed. “I can’t walk or write. There is hope, but it is not easy,” one woman said, “Many times I hear other women as they cry and pray, ‘Lord why me, why me?’”

At long last, Christians are coming together to bring care and comfort, teach prevention, and Christian lifestyle; care for orphans and above all bring the hope we all have in Jesus Christ. HIV/AIDS was one of the major concerns addressed at the Baptist World Alliance Centennial Congress in Birmingham, England, last July.

I thank God for Rick and Kay Warren, for their courage and compassion and for adding HIV/AIDS to the purpose-driven agenda!

This is not a situation in which there will be a quick and easy result, and so I am joining a growing multitude of Christian believers who are putting their energies to this pandemic. I will move to Cape Town, South Africa, to work with the ministry there started by the Fish Hoek Baptist Church, with pastor John Thomas. I am especially committed to serve women who battle this disease. In partnership with the Women’s Missionary Union of Virginia, through their World Missions Unlimited, we will join others to show Christ’s care to women with HIV/AIDS.

Kay Warren from Saddleback Church says, “Christians are called to care.” And as Rick Warren said at the Baptist World Alliance Congress, “If the church does not care, who will?”
Canadian Baptists Look to the Future

An interview with Dr. Gary Nelson, General Secretary of Canadian Baptist Ministries

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz visited the headquarters of the Canadian Baptist Ministries in Mississauga, Ontario. Canadian Baptists have a new vision for the new century. The following interview is with Gary Nelson, General Secretary of the Canadian Baptist Ministries. The challenges confronting the churches’ mission in the 21st Century are similar worldwide. Lotz feels that Gary Nelson’s observations are prophetic reminder for all Baptists how we have to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit and to necessary changes in our missionary witness: (The complete text of this interview can be found in the BWA website: www.bwanet.org.)

Canadian Baptists Ministries, during the past five years, has gone through a restructuring process. What were the reasons that drove Canadian Baptists to this?

In fact we did not go through a restructuring process. The restructuring came as a result of a much more important process. We went through an intensive and focused strategic audit and analysis which was shaped around one crucial question—“what do we need to look like and be like as a national and international organization in the 21st Century?”

Canadian Baptists merged their national and international organizations into one in the middle ‘90s. The merger was a success structurally but they were two very different corporate cultures.

When I came to be General Secretary in 2000, we were still struggling to understand what this new thing was all about. Like many denominational organizations and mission societies we had a significant and dynamic history. However, things had changed. The environment of an increasingly secularized Canadian society, a post denominational atmosphere in our churches, the implications of a global world combined with the vibrancy of the church in the so called developing world demanded new realities. We needed to act more like a movement than an institution and we needed to acknowledge that we couldn’t do everything and instead focus on what we do best.

What are some of the new directions you faced?

We knew that we needed to become more nimble, more open to the mission of the local church and more able to respond to changes strategically. I came to this task after years of pastoral ministry and I was convinced that the local church is the locus of the missionary task. I believed that there was no integrity in CBM expecting financial support from churches that were not taking their missional task seriously where they were. We had to enter that process with our churches where we joined with the local church in mission. The result was campaign called “START LOCAL GO GLOBAL” which was an attempt to signal a new attitude by CBM to be local church friendly.
You have to understand that Canada is an incredible mosaic of cultures. We worship in over 36 different languages on Sunday morning across Canada.

**What were some of the international implications?**

We knew that a different kind of conversation needed to take place with our international partners. We are as much receivers of missionaries from other countries as we are senders. We are as much learners as we are teachers and for that reason alone we had to change the way we dialogue and partner together. We think of it as more egalitarian and mutual where we acknowledge our need for our partners to help us become more effective followers of Jesus Christ and ask them to partner with us.

We knew we had to become more multi-cultural, more diverse in terms of age and more professional in terms of our organizational culture. Today if you came to our office for example you would notice the cultural diversity--almost every language group that we work in globally, except for one, is represented here. Our senior management teams ranges from 35 to 60 years of age-women and men from a variety of backgrounds. Our global staff is as diverse and is a mix of nationals and expatriate Canadians.

**Restructuring is always painful. What were some of the pitfalls and problems in restructuring?**

We have been blessed that this has gone as smoothly as it has; one pitfall is misunderstanding. It is the misunderstanding that some people, who were part of the way that things were done before see the changes being made as a statement against what was done in the past. We were blessed with older leaders—many of the icons of Canadian Baptist life—who have been tremendously supportive to me in this process.

There is no change without pain and there is no strategic reframing that doesn’t fundamentally cause conflict. I have always said that the only one who likes change is the one who is in charge of it. If you forget that – then people get hurt needlessly. I think Christian organizations need to be aware of “people” in their processes but they cannot allow these concerns to block what decisions need to be made. People matter—but so does the mission of the church as it announces the reign of Christ in our world and so leaders of change are called to be both prophetic and priestly in what they do.

**How has Canadian Baptist Ministries become a more efficient and responsive organization of Baptists in Canada?**

This is not an easy time for denominational organizations in North America and in particular in Canada. Canadian society has gone through a deep process of secularization and the result has been the marginalization of the church and religious institutions in a much more profound way than our neighbours to the South. Yet at the same time Canadians are very interested in spirituality—80% of all Canadians say they believe in God but they do not believe in the church. That is our challenge!

We have also witnessed a multiplication of Christian organizations seeking the ear of the church. In fact we knew that often these voices and programs were more appealing to many of our churches because they seemed newer and fresher. We desired to become the organization of choice once again in our local churches. When they thought about church renewal—about mission in the local community or globally, we wanted them to think of CBM first. Everything we are doing at this point is an attempt to make that possible.

**How is the local church more involved?**

One example is our STEP program. STEP is a way in which we at CBM partner together with a local church and a partner overseas in the dialogue of ministry together, creating hands on involvement by the Canadian churches while at the same time dialoguing about what makes good mission and what makes a good partner.

**As you look to the future, where do you see Canadian Baptist Ministries going as far as your overseas relations to other Baptist and Christian groups?**

Canadian Baptists do not have a choice! To be effective followers of Jesus Christ, they are going to have to learn to be Global disciples. They are going to have to learn to dialogue in a multi-cultural and multi-faith world, understanding their unique Christian voice while humbly living like Jesus. We are going to have to learn that a short term mission trip does not make a global disciple, it simply makes a Christian tourist unless we take what we learn and live differently in the communities we live in. We must embrace this new world not run from it.

**What are your hopes and dreams for Canadian Baptists?**

My only hope is that we will address the times that we live in as relevantly as past generations did in theirs. My hope is that we will be allowed to do so by those who have been our forbearers. My dream is a credible and effective Christian presence in the world that can not only speak the gospel but live it.

My dream is that we will become that in our “tribe” of churches and join with those who want to walk this “road less traveled.”
Imagine the scene – it’s March 1402. The young Jan Hus fresh from his triumph as Rector of the Charles University is appointed to this very chapel, this very pulpit as preacher and in so doing enters upon the most important phase of his life. Three thousand citizens of Prague would gather to hear him preach here in this Bethlehem, this house of bread – and it is around the theme of this house of bread (a bethlehem) I want us to reflect at the beginning of this EBF Council in Prague.

So, in this house of bread, the bread of the word broken open in the vernacular, bread of life and bread of joy, there was a great variety of activity. With Sundays, holy days and fast day preachings here in a year Hus preached to the crowds about 250 times a year and over a ten year ministry. But the chapel was more than a preaching station at the heart of this mediaeval city; it was a place of mission and of engagement with society – holistic mission fulfilling the name – House of Bread. Here, unique in Prague at that time, the singing was in Czech and not Latin.

And those sermons for the people in the language of the people, born out of his theological reflection stimulated by his learning about Wyclif, the English proto-reformer were written down by his hearers and we can read them today and discover key similarities with our Anabaptist foreparents and with insights into the mission of the church that I, for one, believe are completely relevant to our situation as baptistic gathering communities in the EBF today and as we gather in this Council.

So, let then become now for us, let this be that – a three-spoked wheel of reflection with both Hus and the Moravian Anabaptists as the two other spokes and a Christocentric experience at the hub of the wheel. For Hus started, in distinction to typical mediaeval Christianity, with a Christocentric heart of the themes and as with the Anabaptists a frequent return to the Sermon on the Mount as a clue, a key into discipleship.

For the Proto-Reformation, for the Anabaptists and for us there are themes at the heart of being in Christ we need to grasp hold of in our Council meeting to move us beyond debate and into discipleship, beyond the structures and into the movement of the spirit – to set a tone for our meetings which echoes the preaching that this chapel heard six centuries ago, to resonate with those fascinating Anabaptist communities of southern Moravia – and of course my own favourite groups around the town of Mikulov who learnt from Hubmaier and where, for over a century, baptistic discipleship was developed and explored. And for ourselves, as we explore over these next three days our life and mission as, to quote our own often-used phrase, we serve as indigenous missionaries in Europe and the Middle East.

Faith implies obedience and discipleship

Of course, for the Hussites, the Anabaptists, and, for many of us, putting on our Christocentric glasses, seeing the Gospels and the Biblical revelation through Jesus, recognising deep truths in the Sermon on the Mount as we read earlier. We are longing to be salt and light in our world – faith leads us to discipleship. Not any old discipleship, but as Jan Milič Lochman reflected three decades ago, here we come to the core of this gathering type of church. Right belief – we have no problem with that, but right practice, orthopraxis is the calling of true discipleship and as Hus sought to understand that in his sermons from this pulpit centuries ago, we as the EBF family face it today – not in the petty rules and attitudes reflective of Old Testament faith, but in the Christ-challenging insights of the Sermon on the Mount. How will these beatitudes be worked out by us now? What will we do, how will we live as authentic disciples of Jesus today so that those around us experience us as salt and light? Let our Council be such a real encounter in what we say and do together.

Gathering churches are totally committed

And what Hus and the Anabaptists were after was total commitment of the gathering believers. For
Hus, for Hubmaier and others it led to martyrdom. We have no wish for that. Some of us know enough about it in our foreparents. But equally let us not shrink from authentic Christian living, which is counter to the prevailing hedonistic cultures by which we are surrounded. Cities set on hills, those who are a light in a world of darkness, might expect a cost and a price. And in our gathering churches we recognise the missional impulse. We have abandoned the closed, settled, gathered church mentality – the private clubs of the self-satisfied and self contained Christians. We reject the Public Christendom churches of the national and folk churches who include all within their bounds and demand nothing by way of sacrifice. No, we long to be the Porous churches who have a totally committed Christocentric community of faith, but we do not look inward, but outward. We welcome others to taste and see if there is really salt in our communities, if we are really light in this dark world, if the house of bread produces leavened loaves of resurrection life.

**From the bottom up not from the top down**

As Hus and the Anabaptists knew, as we must know, gathering churches experience God in Christ calling many into our midst. We do not choose them, God summons them to express their Christ-like vocation amongst us. So as surely as we stand apart from the Pope in Rome or the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, or the Apostolicos in Echtmiadzin, or an Archbishop in Canterbury, we do not create our own popes at home - pastors and preachers above contradiction. No, we recover again the vision of the church that Hus struggled after in his book *De Ecclesia* – the faithful communities where all matter and all are equally intentional in searching for the mind of Christ together. May our Council be that sort of community. Let us experience the Body of Christ as all participate in our discerning. In our Council let none be silenced if the spirit is speaking through them – women, yes women (remember amongst the Anabaptists and early Baptists women played prominent roles in leading churches, evangelising, building up the faithful, preaching ) and men, young and old, ordained and lay.

**Beyond our boundaries — a new form of ecumenism**

Now we come to the heart of Hus and his vision – *De Ecclesia* – where he sees the church as on a world map (the Council will meet in the IBTS chapel with just such a map as a missional prompt), the communities of believers everywhere. The Anabaptists focused on gathering communities in each place, but as John Howard Yoder has powerfully argued, gathering communities interconnected and interdependent. Both Jan Milič Lochman and Yoder claim these communities – the Unitas Fratrum of the Proto-Reformation and the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation as the first true ecumenists of the churches as we know ourselves today. It’s a bold claim, but it’s a claim worthy of our reflection at this Council. What does it mean to be “all one in Christ Jesus”? Have we the strength of faith and the sufficient love of Christ not to be narrow sectarians? Will we at this Council have a wide enough and inclusive enough vision of the ekklesia, the church, and a deep commitment to following Christ in mission.

**In peace, not conflict**

And in this House of Bread, this Bethlehem, we recall the Proto Reformation of the Czech lands, the Anabaptists of Moravia were both born in times of turmoil and war. But the best of them broke the bread of Christ, drank the cup of blessing and gave thanks – eucharista, determined to follow the Sermon on the Mount and the challenge of Jesus – Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall inherit the earth. From this pulpit in 1414 Jan Hus preached about peace. The Bohemian King George of Podraby heard that plea of the Hussites and responded in 1462 with the call for a Peace League of Christian Prince; that sermon of Hus and the desires of the Czech Brothers perhaps reached its zenith in another age of turmoil when that other spiritual giant of these lands, John Amos Comenius, wrote his universal vision of *Christian peace* in 1667.

**Entering the inheritance**

Dare we enter into the inheritance proclaimed in this House of Bread six centuries ago? Do we have enough faith to take up our cross daily as disciples of Christ? Are our gathering churches totally committed to the mission of Christ and the call of the Gospel? Will we give hearing and listen for the spirit of God in all who assemble with us – women and men, young and old? Are our boundaries too narrow or can we break out into God’s greater vision? Will we give peace a chance? On Saturday night, let us reflect on how we have done, so we might indeed be salt in the world, we might be light in a dark place. We might be cities set on a hill. Let us go from this house of bread and let us do it, for Christ’s sake. **AMEN.**
Reports of inspiration, challenge, tragedy and praise, gathered from around the world, draw our diverse Baptist family closer together in the Baptist World Alliance.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, presented Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director Charles Wade with a framed membership certificate signifying the recent acceptance of the BGCT as a full member in the 100-year-old Baptist fellowship.

Lotz noted when the BWA was founded 100 years ago, “85 percent of the world’s Christians lived in Europe and the United States, but now 60 percent of Christians live in the southern hemisphere. There are 400 million believers in Africa, 550 million in Latin America and 360 million in Asia.

“The Church has moved south — and I don’t mean south to Texas but south of the equator,” he said during the BGCT annual meeting. “God didn’t call just the NATO countries when He gave us the Great Commission, He gave it to Christians everywhere.”

Lotz pledged that BWA will continue its work supporting Baptist churches around the world as they preach the gospel, help the needy through Baptist World Aid and work to promote and protect human rights and religious freedom.

“We want religious freedom for everyone, everywhere,” he said. “We want Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims to be free to worship — but we demand the same freedom for Christians. We will continue to tell countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen that since you take advantage of your freedom to build mosques in the United States and Europe then you need to grant us the freedom build churches and freely share our faith in your countries.”

–Craig Bird, Baptist Child & Family Services

Prior to the Texas meeting, on Thursday November 10, the BWA General Secretary presented the certificate of membership in the BWA to John V. Upton Jr., Executive Director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia during the BGAV Annual Meeting in Woodbridge, VA.

Serbia
Baptism

Pastor Zelimir Smec, far left, baptismal candidates and friends from the Open Door ministries in Novi Sad and Elemir. This work is linked with Tabitha a caring ministry developed during recent conflict and war and supported by Baptist World Aid.
Eron M. Henry, an editor, pastor and lecturer from Jamaica, West Indies, has been appointed the new Associate Director of Communications for the Baptist World Alliance effective January 9, 2006.

As Associate Director, Henry will manage all facets of the communication programs of the BWA. These include: the design and management of the Communications plan of the BWA in consultation with the Alliance’s Executive Staff. He will direct all print and online media, to include the BWA website (www.bwanet.org); e-newsletters, the Baptist World, the organization’s quarterly publication and BWA News, the monthly newsletter. He will also serve as the direct link to all media.

Henry will be part of the new BWA Advancement Team headed by Ron Harris, director for Advancement, and consisting of ElizaBeth Wright, associate director of Development.

Henry brings to this position with the BWA more than 18 years experience in religious and secular media, starting in 1987 when he worked as weekly news columnist for the Daily Gleaner newspapers in Jamaica, West Indies. Currently, Henry is head of the Jamaica Baptist Union Media Commission which is responsible for the denomination’s quarterly newspaper, (Jamaica Baptist Reporter), two weekly radio programs (Christ for Today and Youth Sounds), and editor of the website of the Caribbean Reporter.

For six years, Henry was news analyst with Radio Jamaica for a nighttime talk show host with the former Radio WAVES.

Henry has been the director of the e-publishing program at the Montego Bay Community College and up until December 2004, served as Chairman of the Board of Management of the William Knibb Memorial High School, a Baptist school, with more than 1200 students. He was also a part time lecturer with the University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies, having taught New Analysis, English and Communication and Forms of Journalism.

Since 1988 Henry, an ordained minister in the Jamaica Baptist Union, is a Pastor of the Falmouth Circuit of Baptist Churches.

Henry has a Master of Journalism degree from Temple University in the United States where he studied Media Management, Non-fiction Writing, News Editing and New Reporting. He received a special journalism award for academic achievement at Temple University. He has both a Bachelor of Arts Degree (Honors) in Theology from the University of the West Indies, and a Diploma in Ministerial Studies from the United Theological College of the West Indies, both located in Kingston, Jamaica.

An Award-winning journalist, Henry says, “Working with the Baptist World Alliance will be my greatest delight.”

Henry is married to Dawnette and they are the parents of Joyvell (12) and April (8).

Denton Lotz, BWA General Secretary, said, “It is with enthusiasm that we appoint Eron Henry to this position. He possesses the skills and experience for which we have been looking. The Committee felt that the Lord has led us to Henry. We are thankful and pray God’s blessings upon Henry as he moves to the Washington office in January, 2006.”

Karl Johnson, General Secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union, expressed “great support and enthusiasm,” for the appointment of Eron Henry. He stated that, “Jamaica will miss him but Baptists in Jamaica are pleased to offer him to the larger world of Baptists.” Other Jamaican Baptist leaders including Horace Russell and Neville Callam spoke with great approval at the announcement of Henry’s appointment.
This is a story no Baptist will want to miss!... a story full of surprises, of disappointments and breathtaking achievements. This is a story no Baptist will want to miss!... a story full of surprises, of disappointments and breathtaking achievements.

Chronicling the 100 year history of the Baptist World Alliance, it is a story full of surprises—of disappointments and breathtaking achievements, of world leaders and faithful witnesses in obscure corners of the world. It is a story of great strides in medical missions, new frontiers in evangelism, the challenges of human rights, and struggles with Baptist heritage and identity.

Through it all, readers will see the bountiful blessings of God, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, upon the fellowship and cooperative work of the people called Baptists.

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Honolulu, Hawaii
20th Baptist World Congress

From Birmingham... On to Hawaii. For five days, more than 13,000 Baptists from around the world gathered in Birmingham, England to celebrate the Centenary Congress of the Baptist World Alliance. Those who attended have all said that this was an event that was worth the time, money and sacrifice. Many left with a renewed desire to serve Christ and His Church and to promote the unity that was so vividly felt. Five years of planning give birth to a Congress that has been defined as: diverse, truly international, colorful, highly spiritual, enlightening, free of disunity and the list could go on... But now that the curtain is drawn and the lights are off, I imagine that most of the many persons who were there have all gone back to the business of everyday life. Mountain top experiences, such as the congress, can be short lived and values lost if not seen from the perspective of the “big picture”. The Congress, while it is celebrated for five days, is meant to have a long lasting effect for Baptist communities around the world.

We must not allow the spirit of the Congress to be imprisoned by local church politics, traditionalism, or quarrels that can so easily divide us and send the wrong message to those outside of the church. Rather, we must embrace the dynamism that was experienced at the Congress to enhance our music and worship, evangelism and mission, and spiritual development for the total edification of the Church. The Congress should always be a constant reminder that there is unity in diversity and that there is value in coming together to express our oneness in Christ. As you reflect on the Congress, it is our hope that you will be motivated to engage your communities in confronting those issues that tend to marginalize and divide and preach the gospel of peace and reconciliation.

As you reflect on the Birmingham experience and live out the Spirit of the Congress, I also want to ask you to reserve the dates of July 28-August 1, 2010 as we will be in Honolulu, Hawaii for the next BAPTIST WORLD CONGRESS.

The Baptist communities of Hawaii in their invitation said: “though few in number, we welcome with open arms the opportunity to share the love of Christ with brothers and sisters from around the world.”
world. What a privilege it would be for us to extend fellowship to those who would come to the congress.”

The BWA General Council has accepted the invitation and plans are now under way to create another mountain top experience. Please plan to join thousands of fellow Baptists as we celebrate Christ and affirm our brothers and sisters of Hawaiian Baptists.

May God bless you and your ministry and thanks for sharing the Centenary Congress with the world family of Baptist.

— Emmett Dunn, Congress Director

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**Ghana**

Rev. Kojo Amo, General Secretary of the Baptist Convention of Ghana, has invited the Baptist World Alliance to hold its General Council meeting in Accra, Ghana, in 2007.

While in Ghana, Lotz visited with Ghanaian Baptist leaders including Rev. Fred Degbee, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church who also serves as the General Secretary of the Ghana Council of Churches.

Lotz indicated that it will be a great experience for Baptists of the world to experience the hospitality and excitement of the dynamic of Baptists in West Africa.

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**BWA History**

Thanks to Tom Corts, President of Samford University, for publishing the BWA History, a best seller at the BWA Congress. (You may order further copies from the BWA. Check the website: www.bwanet.org) Dr. Corts retires in May.

The BWA appreciates his support and encouragement in printing our BWA history. As a member of our committees and commissions he has been a faithful supporter. Samford University has published several BWA Study and Research books for which Baptists worldwide are grateful.

In July Dr. Corts presented BWA President and General Secretary with copies of the history of the BWA Congress in Birmingham, England. Samford University is an outstanding Baptist institution of higher education located in Birmingham, Alabama!
The Baptist world family has just celebrated one hundred years of global witness, service and fellowship. It was a great and glorious occasion to be with over 13,000 other Baptists in Birmingham, United Kingdom. One key moment of the BWA Centenary Congress was the reception of the BWA Centenary Congress Message*, now being studied and reacted to by Baptists throughout the world.

That important message was no simple saying thanks to the past, but proclaiming in clear terms the faith, life and witness of the world Baptist family as we look to the future. Communities like the world Baptist family recognize that though there is a stability and reliability about the message of God whom we know in Jesus, the way we live out that message, engage in mission together, protect human rights and religious freedom and care for those who suffer for want of food, medicine and work has to engage with the changing context of the world. So, in the past quinquennium, the BWA officers and General Council established a special 21st Century Committee to look at the core values of the BWA and ask questions as to how our Baptist family could be supported through our international team, our General Council, our commissions and committees. It was recognised there is an urgent need to take our message and live it out to God’s praise and glory. The 21st Century Committee* presented its report and now a special Implementation Task Force (ITF) has been appointed representing all the BWA regions and chaired by Keith G Jones (Rector, IBTS, Prague, Czech republic) with Vice Chair, Wanda Lee (Women’s Missionary Union, Birmingham, Alabama, USA) to move from reflection to action.

“It’s a great privilege for Wanda Lee and me, together with the other Task Force Members, to serve our world family in this way. There are many exciting thoughts we have already drawn out of the report of the 21st Century Committee and we are working as fast as we can to implement the ideas. We need your prayers to get this right and to develop the best shape for the BWA structures to serve our global family effectively in our second one hundred years,” says ITF chair, Keith G. Jones.

- Both the BWA Centenary Congress Message and the 21st Century Report are available on the BWA web site and in a variety of major world languages.
TRAVELLING ON THE NIGHT TRAIN from Moscow to St Petersburg is a memorable journey and was my mode of transport in October 1991 on the first of my visits to the city designed by Peter the Great to be a ‘window on the west’.

My transport to St Petersburg in October 2005 was a more conventional air flight from London. I was travelling to join the BWA ‘Living Water’ Conference in Zelenogorsk, on the shores of the Baltic Sea, where 250 delegates had gathered from almost every Russian speaking country of Eastern Europe.

It was a joy to renew fellowship with old friends like Elnur Jabiyev, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Azerbaijan, and Asatur Nahapetyan, General Secretary of the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists of Armenia. Both of these young Christian leaders in their early 30’s have stirring testimonies of God’s saving grace in their lives. Elnur prior to his conversion was a Muslim teacher in a Mosque and a student in the Police Academy. Asatur was involved in drugs and street gangs until the Lord rescued him and called him to Christian ministry.

These leaders know the refreshing power of Jesus Christ the Living Water and it motivates them in the mission leadership they give to their Unions.

During the conference we heard how God is stirring the churches of the Russian Baptist Union with a visionary commitment for missionary work among Russian speaking people. Under the inspirational leadership of their President Yuri Sipko (who also serves as a Vice President of the BWA) and the Union’s Vice President Peter Miskevitch, Baptist Christians face a humanly impossible challenge of bringing the gospel to the numerous people groups of the mighty nation of Russia.

The Baptist Union has sponsored mission teams which have visited all parts of Russia where there has been no previous Baptist witness. To date they have travelled over 60,000 miles including trips to the frozen regions of northern Siberia where the population live in tents, and have visited over 400 prisons where they have shared the gospel with inmates.

For all the evident encouragements emanating from Russia, it is obviously much harder to evangelise in 2006 than it was in the early days of the 1990’s. Heather J. Coleman underlines this in her newly published book ‘Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929’ (Indiana University Press). In her introduction she suggests that as the old socialist ideals lost their lustre in the early 1990’s, people did flock to churches seeking alternative personal and communal identity to replace Soviet ones. But in the early part of the 21st century this no longer happens and the spiritual expectations of a spiritual revival throughout Russia has not materialised.

This viewpoint was confirmed in the report of the Russian Baptist Union Evangelism Director, Ruvim Valoshin, who revealed that Russian Baptists were facing up to this spiritual challenge. He shared that the mission teams had discovered three main reasons why some Russian Baptist churches find it difficult to get involved in evangelistic ministries. First, there is a narrow minded attitude which is not open to new methods. Second, there is lack of faith to believe that unbelievers would come to a Christian meeting if invited. He told us that one elderly deacon in a Baptist church told him ‘I am afraid to arrange a meeting, because I don’t believe anyone will come’. Ruvim said the team persuaded the church to convene a meeting and ten people turned up. He said, ‘You should have seen the deacon’s face!’ The third reason for a lack of confidence to engage in evangelism is an inability to relate to those who are beyond the local church. Apparently, the frequently asked questions from some Russian Christians are ‘How do we speak to unbelievers?’ and ‘How do we befriend non Christian neighbours?’

This is the challenge to so many Christians round the world - and not just Russia. We need to understand that Christian mission has never evangelised a culture by avoiding it. Perhaps the starting place is a greater dependence on the strategic guidance of the Holy Spirit who is able to lead us into places we may fear to go. The other missionary gift that needs to be developed in the church is the ability to stand in the shoes of the spiritually thirsty.
By David Gal of Hungarian Baptist Aid and Paul Montacute, Director of Baptist World Aid

The Baptist World Aid (BWAid) / Hungarian Baptist Aid (HBAid) relief program is continuing in Pakistan. As BWAid began to receive donations, $40,000 was immediately made available to HBAid.

The BWAid Rescue24 team of BWAid / HBAid left Hungary on the 9th of October, only a day after the devastating earthquake in Kashmir, Pakistan. They arrived in the country within 24 hours and after some delay at the Chaklala airbase they were airlifted to the disaster site in Bagh, Kashmir.

Although they did not find survivors under the ruins, the team provided medical care for the sick and injured. From the nearby mountains, hundreds of earthquake victims who had been without food came down to the valley bringing the injured with them. During the first five days the team’s doctors and paramedics attended almost 400 casualties.

Another group, a Medical and Relief Team, left Hungary on Wednesday, October 12 for Pakistan.

The team worked together with the BWAid Rescue24 team to buy and distribute tents, blankets, food, medicines and medical equipment. When the first rescue team left the country, they left behind $3,000 worth of tents, sleeping bags and generators. The Medical and Relief Team continued the preparation for further relief work, bringing further tents and equipment for the victims.

On 19th October the 3rd BWAid Relief Team left for Pakistan with the disaster relief director for Virginia Baptists, USA, and one relief coordinator from HBAid. They took $30,000 to establish a camp in Bagh and its neighbourhood to ensure the survival of the earthquake victims during the coming cold winter months.

Paul Montacute, the Director of Baptist World Aid, has again emphasised the need for the worldwide Baptist family to continue to give generously to BWAid’s Earthquake appeal.

‘The search and rescue teams have left, but our people are still there trying to provide tents, blankets, food, water and medicine,’ he said. ‘This costs money, and that is why we need the ongoing support and supply of donations from Baptist Unions and Conventions, Churches and Individuals.’

Donations designated to BWAid’s Earthquake appeal can be made at www.bwanet.org/bwaid or to the following:

China Amity – 20 Years of Bible Printing & Humanitarian Work by Chinese Christians

In just 20 years, Chinese Christians have printed and distributed over 30 million Bibles, all printed at the Amity Press in Nanjing. In addition, many thousands of Chinese people have been helped through Amity’s disaster relief, education, health and social work programs.

In a celebration to mark the 20th Anniversary of Amity, over 200 guests from Christian denominations and organisations participated. Paul Montacute, Baptist World Aid director, represented the Baptist World Alliance, and there were also representatives from the American Baptists, Cooperative Baptists and Virginia Baptists.

With the printing presses at Amity now able to print a Bible every second, the need to relocate to a larger site, where expansion is possible, became necessary. The US $30 million project is supported by the United Bible Societies and many of the represented organisations.

Chinese Christian leaders Bishop Ting and Pastor Cao joined in the anniversary celebrations and also at the ground-breaking of the new Amity Printing House. With Chinese fire crackers and streamers being fired into the air, Montacute and other leaders took up the ceremonial shovels to break the ground and lay the foundation stone.

Bishop Ting challenged all present to aim to put a Bible into every Chinese home.

Assistance to Amity’s projects to provide Bibles or assist in social programs can be sent to Baptist World Aid at the Baptist World Alliance.