BWA Staff & Friends Recognize John O. Peterson

On November 28, 2006, the Baptist World Alliance staff and BWA friends in the Washington, DC, area recognized the outstanding work of John O. Peterson, retiring pastor of Alfred Street Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia. Peterson has served as Vice President of the BWA, Chair of the Budget Committee, and member of the Personnel Committee.

BWA General Secretary, Denton Lotz, in presenting a plaque to Peterson in recognition of his service to the Baptist World Alliance, said, “John Peterson has been the unofficial chaplain for the Baptist World Alliance staff these past twenty-five years. He has visited us and taken a very personal interest in all of our staff.

“But more than that, his energetic support of the Baptist World Alliance financially and spiritually, through his church, and his encouragement of his members and young people to come to conferences and congresses has increased the visibility of the Baptist World Alliance in the African-American Baptist community in the Washington, DC, area.

“There are few words found to express the deep appreciation that we have for Dr. Peterson. During a very difficult time in the life of the Baptist World Alliance, he gave us much encouragement and hope.”

The Baptist World Alliance indeed is grateful to pastors such as John O. Peterson, who make possible the ministry of the Baptist World Alliance.

(Cover Photo) The Nairobi Living Water conference was a watershed for African Baptists who responded with great enthusiasm, exuberant singing and dancing, and fervent prayer.

Unless otherwise noted, photos in the issue are by BWA staff.
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As a new year begins for the Baptist World Alliance, we must continually remind ourselves of our message. In the secular world of today which takes its inspiration from Post Modernism, a movement without absolutes which emphasizes the relativism of all religions by maintaining that they are either irrelevant or all the same, Jesus becomes just one of the many gurus and religious teachers who taught about God. We are told that Christians are intolerant for speaking of Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. There are many roads to God. Why only Jesus?

The center and goal of the Christian life is Jesus Christ. The Christian cannot talk about God without talking about Jesus. To ask Christians to give up Jesus is asking us to give up our faith. We preach Christ because we believe that when we meet him, we meet God—not a part of God, but all of God. That's why the doctrine of the trinity is so basic! Scripture tells us: “Christ is the image of the invisible God…. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:15f).

If we, as Christians, believe that indeed Jesus is God, then this has consequences in speaking with men and women of other faiths. We must not be ashamed of the Gospel. By word and deed we must make clear who Jesus is and what he means to us. We do not preach our culture, our language, or even our religion or denomination. We do not preach to make people Baptists, but we share the good news of Jesus.

D. T. Niles, the great Methodist theologian of Sri Lanka, was once preaching in India. Indian intellectuals confronted him and asked, “Are you greater than Gandhi?” D. T. Niles answered emphatically, “Of course not!” “Do you love more than Gandhi?” Again the answer was, “No! Gandhi was a greater man than I.” Then the Indian scholars asked, “Well, what do you as a Christian have to tell Gandhi?” D.T. Niles answered simply, “I have the same message and question for him as for everyone else: ‘What have you done about what God has done for you in Jesus Christ?’”

Indeed it is to Christ that the Christian points. That is why Karl Barth said Gruenewald’s painting of the Four Evangelists located in Colmar, France, is the best depiction of an evangelist. In the painting, all of the evangelists are pointing to Jesus.

In 1928 at the Jerusalem Mission Conference, there was already confusion and much talk about secularism. Archbishop William Temple was asked to write the message of the conference. Bishop Neill tells the story that all night Temple slept in a little tent and with a flashlight wrote the message that began simply, “Our message is Jesus Christ.” That is indeed our message.

Our proclamation of the good news must, however, not be in arrogance. We proclaim the good news best when we have the attitude of Jesus: “Who being in the form of God emptied himself…and took upon himself the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). This is how we proclaim Christ: not by swords, not by power, not by cultural arrogance, not by superior feelings, not by false promises of prosperity, but, instead, in humility and servanthood. Perhaps the words of St. Francis are appropriate for evangelism in our day: “Preach always, and if necessary use words.”

The Church seems always to be swinging between extremes: 1) to use the sword and power, or 2) to accommodate the message to culture and deny Christ’s divinity. This is why theological education is important. We need to be good scholars of scripture and listen to the Holy Spirit interpret scripture through the ages. When Jesus sent out his disciples, we are reminded that He breathed on them the Holy Spirit! (John 20:22) Not new methods, but a new indwelling of the Holy Spirit is what is bringing men and women to Christ worldwide.

In the midst of the conflict of religions today, Jesus comes again to his people and says, “Put back your sword.” We follow Christ best when we imitate his love and follow his teaching, “If anyone would follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). We point to Christ, not to ourselves. Let us begin the New Year with a new devotion to Christ and remember his words, “When I am lifted up…. I will draw all humanity to myself” (John 12:31).
The Baptist Association of Belize held its Annual General Meeting on October 7. Forty-five of the 54 churches within the association were represented, including the Maya/Ketchi, Latino and English churches.

Despite heavy rain that fell for more than a week, the Lagoon Road Baptist Church in Belize City, host for the meeting, was overcrowded, with participants traveling as many as 150 miles from both north and south in the country.

Retired pastor, 88 year old Percy Chastenet, was recognized and presented with a plaque for his many years of dedicated and outstanding service to God and Baptist work in Belize.

A highlight of the day for the Baptist Association of Belize, founded in 1822, was the elections. Ashley Rocke was elected president and will serve a two-year term along with four vice presidents and other executive members.

The recent 33-day war left thousands of Lebanese traumatized – men, women and children. It was with the children in mind that the Lebanese Baptist Society organized two post-war children’s events in the Bekaa Valley – a children’s camp and a festival reaching together around 600 children. As they went home, the children received Back-to-School kits, Picture Bibles, and coloring books. The Lebanese Baptist Society (LBS) and the Baptist Youth Ministry have developed a one-year plan for a series of children and youth activities.

The relief efforts have transitioned into community development projects that are of public benefit and serve to strengthen Christian presence in the areas of focus in South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. These projects are organized by the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development of the LBS and are made possible through the joint efforts of international and local partners, including Baptist World Aid (BWAid).

The projects are mainly water-related ones, and include an irrigation project in Mieh w Mieh (South Lebanon), an artesian well in Deir Mimas (South Lebanon) and another in Khorbet Kanafar (Bekaa). The Mieh w Mieh and Khorbet Kanafar projects are already in progress. Work in Deir Mimas will begin once the legal documentation is completed. A fourth water project under consideration is for the town of Bourj El Moulouk (South Lebanon). BWAid has contributed $15,000 for these water-related projects.

Both the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and Beirut Baptist School, which housed around 1,000 displaced people during the war, were able to start the 2006/07 academic year on time. The publishing house, Dar Manhal Al Hayat, is preparing to launch new Arabic language books in the coming months.

Lebanese Baptists continue to be involved in ministry outside of their own country, with projects in Northeast Africa and the Middle East. BWAid has contributed funds to assist Lebanese Baptists’ ministry in these regions as well as their annual Christmas outreach project.
The Baptist World Alliance Executive Committee Meetings will be held in Falls Church, Virginia, March 5-7. The Executive Committees of all of BWA's departments and divisions will meet during the week in addition to the BWA Executive Committee meeting on Wednesday, March 7.

It is expected that an announcement of the nominee for new General Secretary is expected from the Personnel Committee at the Executive Committee Meeting on Wednesday. The General Council will vote on the nominee at the Annual Gathering held in Ghana in July.

The Implementation Task Force, responsible for the implementation of the recommendations of the 21st Century Committee, will report on their progress as they seek to make the five ‘clusters of commitment’ a reality in the life of the BWA.

The Executive Committee meetings will be preceded by a North American Baptist Federation celebration banquet for Denton and Janice Lotz on Saturday, March 3, in honor of their years of service to the BWA.

In Memoriam

William J. Harvey, III, the former Executive Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. died on September 20.

Harvey suffered a stroke on September 8 while attending the Annual Session of the National Baptist Convention in Dallas, Texas. Harvey served the Foreign Mission Board for 40 years from 1961 until 2001. He pioneered mission work across the continents of Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. The funeral service was held at First African Baptist Church of Philadelphia on Saturday, September 30.

William Harvey

Hans-Harald Mallau, former professor at International Baptist Theological Seminary, (IBTS) died of cancer in Reutlingen, Germany, on October 25. Mallau taught for many years at the previous campus of IBTS in Rüschlikon, Switzerland. IBTS is a European Baptist Federation-run institution that is now located in Prague, Czech Republic.

Born in Königsberg, East Prussia, he spent his entire career as an avid academic. After studying theology in Kiel, Boston and Hamburg, he worked initially as Theological Assistant at the University of Kiel, Germany. In 1969 he served briefly as Guest Professor for Old Testament at IBTS. He then taught from 1970 to 1977 in Buenos Aires before returning to IBTS, where he served as Professor of Old Testament until his retirement in 1995.
Croatia
Baptist Congress Televised Nationally

More than 400 delegates attended the congress of the Baptist Union of Croatia in Cakovec, Zagreb, held October 20 to 22, 2006. The morning worship on Sunday was televised nationally, the first time in the country’s history that a Baptist service appeared on national television.

The 2000-member convention has experienced renewal in the past few years, with an increase in baptisms and the formation of small discipleship groups. Previously viewed as a sect in the predominantly Roman Catholic country, Baptists are gaining greater acceptance.

Croatia was part of the former Yugoslavia, which broke apart after the fall of communism in 1989. Since then, Baptist church membership has doubled. This is due in part to the newfound freedom, as well as the goodwill generated by the response of Baptists to needs caused by the Croatian War of Independence waged between 1991 and 1995.

There are 41 churches in the union and several departments, including Croatian Baptist Aid, its relief and development arm. The union’s president is Toma Magda.

Cuba
Churches Reach Out

Lightening and thunder, which killed a young man in a dam nearby, did not stop an October 21 baptism at a river near Birán, Cuba, close to Cuban President Fidel Castro’s birthplace. The six who were baptized are now members of the Baptist church in Marcané, northeast of the city of Holguín.

The church, founded in the early 1940s, closed after its members drifted away as there was no proper sanctuary or pastor. But in 2003, Yoiquender Abella, a recent seminary graduate, restarted the church. Now there are 50 members with three mission outposts in surrounding neighborhoods.

At Mayarí in the mountainous region northeast of Santiago de Cuba, the Mount Zion Baptist Church implemented an agricultural project that benefits the congregation and the wider community. Built on a farm run by Eugenio Perdomo, a lay missionary, the project is aimed at boosting nutrition in the area. The farm rears rabbits, chickens, and more than one hundred pigs, and is a welcome boost to the economically depressed area.

The Mayarí agricultural project is one of an increasing number of social ministry programs conducted in Cuba by Baptist churches. The island nation has one of the largest Baptist constituencies in the Caribbean. There are two large conventions and two smaller unions which total almost 600 churches and approximately fifty thousand members. The Baptist World Alliance held its General Council meeting in Havana in July 2000.

Central America
BWA Vice President Receives Award

Baptist World Alliance Vice President Gustavo Parajón was presented with the Francisco Morazán medallion in October. The presentation by the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) was made during a ceremony at First Baptist Church of Managua, where Parajón is senior pastor. He was recognized for his work for peace and reconciliation during the war between Nicaragua’s revolutionary government and the Contra guerrillas in the 1980s.

The action of PARLACEN comes as part of a growing chorus of appreciation for Parajón’s decades-long ministry. In 2002, during the celebration of its 150th anniversary, the City of Managua awarded Parajón its Sesquicentennial Medallion as one of the city’s outstanding citizens. In July of this year, the Baptist World Alliance, at its meeting in Mexico City, gave Parajón its 2006 Human Rights Award for his peacemaking ministry.

Parajón, a Nicaraguan medical doctor and ordained pastor, served along with his wife, Joan, as an American Baptist missionary in Nicaragua between 1964 and 2003. He founded two major organizations. PROVADENIC (Vaccination and Communal Development Project of Nicaragua), founded in 1967, was started in partnership with the First Baptist Church of Cleveland, the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention and the First Baptist Church of Managua. It is a primary health care program that serves 25 rural communities by training local health promoters to treat and prevent common illnesses.

The second organization, CEPAD (Nicaraguan Council of Evangelical Churches), was founded in 1972 as an interdenominational relief organization to aid victims after an earthquake severely damaged the capital Managua and other parts of the country, taking more than 10,000 lives. CEPAD has broadened its ministry and now serves congregations of approximately 45 different member denominations and the population at large with emergency relief, development and reconciliation programs.

BWA Vice President Gustavo Parajon of Nicaragua (center) with President David Coffey (left) after receiving the BWA Human Rights Award in July. Parajon was awarded the Francisco Morazán medallion from the Central American Parliament in October.
Eighty seven women from 16 National Baptist Women’s Unions attended the Baptist Women’s Leadership Conference of Latin America. It was held in El Salvador, September 27-30, 2006, and presided over by Gloria Cabrera de Rivera, President of the Baptist Women’s Union of Latin America (UFBAL) and a Salvadorian. The theme was ‘Faith breaks down barriers.’

There was emphasis on Baptist principles and doctrines. The women gave consideration to aspects of the Pauline letters, including the pastoral epistles, which, in the view of the meeting, are to be interpreted in light of the broader New Testament for today’s woman.

At the end of the conference on Saturday, September 30, the sisters of UFBAL agreed upon the following declaration:

To permit ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit in order to impact our world with the Biblical teachings received, as worthy daughters of God, capable of tearing down barriers and creating bridges in His name.

Dorothy Selebano, President of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department, and Patsy Davis, Executive Director, were among the speakers.

Other speakers included Alicia de Zorzoli, Baptist Spanish Publishing House; Dinorah Mendez, professor at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Mexico; Ruth S. Valencia, Counselor for In Touch Ministries; Bicri N. Hernandez, Hospital Chaplain; and Elizabeth de Prokopchuk, pastor and wife of Alberto Prokopchuk, BWA Regional Secretary for Latin American.
The Bangladesh Rural Youth Fellowship Center (BRYFC) held its National Student and Youth Gathering from October 1 to 4, 2006.

Held at the Santikutir Baptist Mission Compound, there were 170 participants, including Baptist youth from throughout Bangladesh. Speakers included Peter Sarkar, Executive Secretary of BRYFC and a Baptist. He is also Coordinator for Southeast Asia Harvesters International.

An aim of the youth group is to distribute a ‘Muslim Version Bible’. Each person pledged to give a Bible to a Muslim friend. Bangladesh, a South Asian country bordering India, has the seventh largest population in the world, estimated at more than 147 million people. The majority population is Muslim at 88 percent with 11 percent Hindu.

There are three BWA-affiliated conventions in Bangladesh with an approximate membership of forty thousand and almost one thousand churches.

BRYFC also held ‘Bible Camp 2006’ on October 11, where Sarkar and Samuel Mukhati, Secretary of Suagaram Baptist Church, were among the speakers. Another youth program was held October 24 to 27 at the South Satla Baptist Church Compound in Barisal.

UFBAL representatives at the Baptist Women’s Leadership Conference of Latin America

The overall theme of this phase, from 2006-2010, is “The Word of God in the Life of the Church: Scripture, Tradition and Koinonia.”

The second meeting of these conversations will take place in 2007. At the conclusion of the five-year process, the joint commission will issue a report of its findings.

Former Baptist World Alliance president Billy Kim has been a friend of the new Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, for more than 20 years. Several days before Christmas, Kim was invited to breakfast at the residence of the new leader of the UN. BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz accompanied Kim as well as several other friends.

Kim spoke of the modesty and honesty of Ban, who was South Korea’s foreign minister, and who assumes his duties at the UN on January 1, 2007. The informal breakfast provided an opportunity for fellowship and prayer. Kim told Ban, the first Korean to assume the UN leadership, “We want to pray for you that God will give you wisdom and courage during these difficult days. We will pray for you every day.”

Lotz said, “The new Secretary General is a man of great humility. He took time out of his very busy schedule and treated us with great kindness. He is concerned about peace, justice, and religious freedom worldwide. It was impressive that Mr. Ban is very concerned about restoring trust to the United Nations. We promised that Baptists around the world would pray for Mr. Ban as he leads the UN. We prayed that Mr. Ban would have wisdom and courage while dealing with major world issues such as genocide in Darfur in Sudan, and peace in the Middle East.”

In a world torn by the tragic clash of civilizations, suffering, and war, Baptists of the world should join with men and women of goodwill everywhere and pray and work for peace. Jesus calls us again and again, “Blessed are the Peacemakers.”

Let’s pray for Mr. Ban and the awesome responsibilities confronting him as the new leader of the UN.

(Pictured left to right): Billy Kim, Ban Ki-Moon, and Denton Lotz
AFRICAN BAPTISTS DRINK OF THE LIVING WATER

BY TONY CUPIT

TEARS CAME TO MY EYES as I watched Baptist World Alliance President, David Coffey, and African leaders Paul Msiza and Fletcher Kaiya, wash the feet of seven young leaders from throughout the continent of Africa. All Africa Baptist Fellowship (AABF) President, Andre Bokundoa, explained the foot-washing experience by saying “We must do this to exhibit our humility and our oneness.”

The Living Water conference focused on developing leadership and promoting evangelism. It was an experience of unity and growth for the 150 African delegates who attended, 35 of whom came from the Francophone countries in West and Central Africa.

Young “emerging” leaders played a vital role at the conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, in October, sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance and conducted

(Continued on next page)
in conjunction with the AABF’s Assembly, which occurs every five years.

Christ the Living Water – that wonderful phrase, that meaningful image, was certainly highlighted in Nairobi. The phrase seemed to be on the lips of every worship leader, presenter and preacher. Coffey, when addressing the AABF Assembly, said that while he had been at other Living Water conferences, never had he experienced so many wonderful insights and illustrations that so powerfully amplified the theme.

Delegates gathered together for joint worship experiences, focus groups and Bible studies. Preachers, including David Coffey, Terry Rae from South Africa, Steve Asante from Ghana and Ron Bobo from the United States, challenged those present to take seriously the demands of discipleship while humbly rejoicing in the joy of salvation in Christ the Living Water. Following Rae’s sermon, the congregation was given an opportunity to come forward and wash their hands in large basins of water. Rae explained that for some the washing of their hands would symbolize cleansing from sin, while for others it may represent sharing and fellowship. Others would see it as an opportunity to be free of some negative spirit they were harboring toward a brother or sister. Many responded to the invitation to come forward.

Perhaps the Living Water theme was best expressed at early morning devotions held by a stream flowing near the Brackenhurst Conference Center. The beautiful setting was an ideal place for reflection, prayer and praise. It was so moving to hear the soft sounds of the running water, to see the images and reflections in the water, to hear the songs of the birds and to drink in the beautiful scenery.

The focus groups that met several times throughout the week provided opportunities for delegates to share from their experiences.

BWA President David Coffey speaks during the Living Water conference.

Delegates gathered together for joint worship experiences, focus groups and Bible studies.
experiences. Some topics included: Developing and sustaining churches in Africa, Models for evangelism and discipleship, Living Water and theological education, Living Water and the Holy Spirit and, one of the most popular sessions, Doing ministry with limited resources.

Special events

It would be inappropriate to conduct any type of conference in Africa without dealing with the problem of HIV/AIDS that is devastating this great continent. A morning was dedicated to discussing this issue. Two HIV positive Kenyans, Fred Onyango and Sylvia Opando, spoke about their experiences and a young man who works full-time in AIDS education from the Democratic Republic of Congo shared powerfully about his ministry. Fletcher Kaiya from Malawi, who with his wife has taken 14 AIDS orphans into their home, gave good input about the subject, urging the churches to be more engaged rather than leaving this ministry just to the secular activists.

A special event at the Living Water conference was the visit of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo. The president of the most populated country in Africa is a committed Baptist layman. When he was imprisoned by an earlier regime, he wrote Bible studies. Obasanjo’s speech to the conference delegates revealed him as not only a follower of Jesus, but as an extremely well-informed and intelligent interpreter of events in church and society. His presence was a wonderful affirmation for Baptists in Africa and the secular press gave the event great coverage.

One of the four vice-presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Msr. Azarias Ruberwa Manywa, also visited the conference. He is a humble brother, still reasonably young, and a member of the church where Andre Bokundoa is pastor. BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz interviewed Ruberwa in a conference session and he shared how he came to Christ, why he had entered politics, some of the challenges of the task and his plea that integrity becomes the mark of the political leaders of Africa.

The Living Water conference and AABF Assembly were saddened by the absence of Frank Adams, Regional Secretary of the AABF, who was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease some months prior. Special times of prayer were allocated to pray for Frank and his wife, Selina.

The Living Water conference was an excellent event, but the conference’s ultimate effectiveness is to a large extent dependant on the follow-up that takes place once the delegates return to their respective countries and ministries. As Baptist World Aid Director, Paul Montacute, told the delegates, “We

For some the washing of their hands would symbolize cleansing from sin, for others sharing and fellowship. Others would see it as an opportunity to be free of some negative spirit harbored toward a brother or sister.

The value of this opportunity for Baptist leaders from all over Africa to come together to share their joys and sorrows, their praise and worship and understanding of faith cannot be minimized.

(Continued on page 15)
“The church is part of the larger society. Its members live in a society that is plagued with all sorts of challenges, contradictions... and a penchant for negating all the values in the Holy Bible.”

With these words, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, challenged the All Africa Baptist Fellowship (AABF) during the Living Water Conference. ‘Jesus Christ – Living Water’ is an international evangelism and leadership program by the Baptist World Alliance. The meetings were held in conjunction with the 6th Assembly of the AABF in Nairobi, Kenya, from October 8 to 13.

Obasanjo, a Baptist, bemoaned the state of Africa, declaring that “Our continent remains challenged by critical development and humanitarian situations.” The leader of Africa’s most populous country called for “Careful and spiritually guided analyses (so) that we can extricate critical issues that affect the church in Africa and know where we are, where we should be, and how to get our established goals.”

Obasanjo suggested that leaders should draw inspiration from scripture to manage the political and economic concerns of the resource-rich continent. The church, he said, should reinvent itself “As a relevant progressive institution, and a pro-active partner in the AU (African Union).” The AU is the continental organization consisting of 53 African states.

The head of one of the largest oil exporters in the world confidently declared that Africa is changing. “This is a new Africa,” he asserted. New movements in democracy, renewed accountability, and socio-economic reforms all will lead to growth, development and prosperity. He made special reference to NEPAD, New Partnership for Africa’s Development, an economic development program of the AU. NEPAD’s four primary objectives are to eradicate poverty; promote sustainable growth and development; integrate Africa in the world economy; and accelerate the empowerment of women.

He also referred to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), an instrument voluntarily acceded to by the member states of the AU as a self-monitoring mechanism. The mandate of the APRM is to encourage conformity in regard to political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards, among African countries.

And in welcoming President Obasanjo, BWA President David Coffey said, “We honor you for your public witness to Jesus Christ. For openly testifying to your Christian faith; for your courageous confronting of corruption; for your advocacy of the National Christian Center of Nigeria; for enabling legislation for the establishment of Christian Universities in Nigeria, the first of which was the Baptist University at IWO; for your wider role of leadership in the United Nations and other world forums.”

Obasanjo declared that the challenge to “Christians today in Africa is how we can effectively be light and salt with the dark and tasteless corners of our communities and societies.” He concluded that “We can only do this with the grace of God through Jesus Christ.”
have had our worship, now it is time for our service.” Fausto Vasconcelos, BWA Director of Evangelism and Education, offered to assist in any way possible to help unions and conventions pursue the Living Water theme and promote evangelism and servant-leadership. It is exciting to note that already the AABF’s Western sub-region has planned to have a conference on the theme, Christ the Living Water, in Togo in October 2007, and the AABF Youth Department wants to hold a nationwide Living Water conference. The AABF Women’s Assembly will highlight the Living Water theme when they meet in Kenya in August 2007.

The Nairobi Living Water conference was a watershed for African Baptists if we can go by the spirit of the delegates, their great enthusiasm for the Living Water theme, their boisterous singing and dance, their fervent prayer and the appreciative comments. The value of this opportunity for Baptist leaders from all over Africa to come together in an AABF/BWA Living Water conference to share their joys and sorrows, their praise and worship and understanding of faith, cannot be minimized.

The conference’s ultimate effectiveness is to a large extent dependant on the follow-up that takes place once the delegates return to their respective countries and ministries.

(Above right): From left, Chamunorwa Chiromo of Zimbabwe, Ron Bobo of the USA, BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz, and Paul Msiza of South Africa.

(Right): “Tears came to my eyes as I watched . . . .” BWA President David Coffey washes the feet of young African leaders, in an expression of humility and oneness.

(Right): BWA and African Baptist leaders pose with President Obasanjo (seated fourth from left).
Europe and the Middle East

The European Baptist Federation (EBF) is one of the most diverse of the six continental federations that make up the Baptist World Alliance. It has responsibility for Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, in addition to European countries. The 51-member body is spread far and wide and incorporates some of the major flashpoints around the world. Tony Peck, General Secretary, and Helari Puu, President, lead the federation.

A major flashpoint in the world and for the EBF is the Middle East which includes the Association of Baptist Churches of Israel, and conventions and unions in predominantly Arab countries, such as the Lebanese Baptist Society and the Baptist Church in Baghdad. Yet there is camaraderie, due in part to the fact that most Israeli Christians are Arabs, centered in cities such as Haifa and Nazareth with large Arab populations.

During the recent war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Christians on both sides of the border expressed support for, and offered prayer on the behalf of each other.

Baptists are a minority in almost every country in the EBF. In Europe, the strong church movements are Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, and those

It is in coming together, through the EBF, that the minority Baptist groups in these countries find strength.
The European Baptist Federation (EBF) has formed an anti-trafficking workgroup within its External Relations Division to assist persons who are victims of human trafficking.

Described as a form of modern slavery, human trafficking mainly affects women and children, most of whom are forced into prostitution. Those who oppose it, and work with victims, are similar to those who opposed slavery and the slave trade. A nineteenth century British Missionary to Jamaica, William Knibb, “Campaigned tirelessly for freedom for the slaves, and lived to see their final emancipation,” states Tony Peck, General Secretary of the EBF. This Baptist tradition is carried on by present day advocacy and support for victim groups such as those who suffer from human trafficking.

Chair of the anti-trafficking workgroup, Sven-Gunnar Liden of Sweden, says that those who are trafficked into
prostitution are not ‘volunteers’ and are often pressured into the sex industry. “All trafficking is organized by criminal networks” and “Prostitutes become victims of their past,” the Swedish Baptist pastor explains. In showing that trafficking, and hence prostitution, is led by networks and not the women themselves, Liden gives the example of Internet-based prostitution. “It is highly unlikely that a girl from a poor country would be able to buy her own ticket to Sweden, rent an apartment there, have nude photographs taken of her, set up a website, and present herself on it in (the) Swedish (language).”

Western values feed the traffic of women and girls into prostitution, Liden asserts. Elaine Storkey of Oxford University in England agrees. “Human beings are made into commodities: things, labor machines, leisure accessories.” Declaring that “Trafficking in persons is the opposite of God’s design for creation,” Storkey, a Senior Research Fellow and the UK President of Tearfund, says, “The sex industry is able to make humans become slaves to the power of sin.” She asserts that Christians need to challenge the prevailing view of human personhood that pervades western and other societies.

Lauran Bethell of the American Baptist Churches describes trafficking of human beings as one of the “Messiest of situations that we have in our world today.” Now based in Prague of the Czech Republic, the 2005 recipient of the Baptist World Alliance Human Rights Award explains that victims of trafficking are “Vulnerable, helpless and entrapped because of the threats and brutality of the traffickers. It becomes extremely difficult to escape.” This is why they need help, and no other group is better positioned to help than the church.
European federation have a bright future. Hungarian Baptist Aid has one of the most sophisticated emergency response teams among Baptists in the world, rivaling, and better than many in North America. Ukraine has the largest Baptist membership on the continent, and is still growing. Russia is eager to get on with mission work, and is recruiting hundreds of young people in the mission field. Sweden has 100 missionaries in 100 countries.

The EBF has the capacity to overcome the various challenges and difficulties it faces.

As churches are well-networked, they can provide information sharing amongst themselves. This is because “Churches represent people at the grassroots of our societies... who are often observant of what is happening in their communities,” says Bethell. Besides, the church is the one institution that can provide the compassion and caring attitude that is needed to assist those who suffer from human trafficking.

Confronting human trafficking and traffickers can be dangerous. It is “Reaching into the dark corners of the world” that often involves “Mafia-type organizations,” Bethell, who spent 14 years working in Thailand with exploited women and children, explains. One young Hungarian teenager who escaped after being tricked into prostitution dared not return home as the trafficker knows where her parents live. She now resides in a shelter. Another was chased and tracked down by her ‘employer’, but was able to escape.

Rescuing those who are victims is not easy. The first difficulty is in locating victims, who are often discovered only during police raids. Assuming that they are rescued, they need further protection, shelter and medical care. Often, psychiatric care, psychological counseling, as well as emotional support are required. Because most come from a background of poverty, many need education and training, as well as financial assistance. They usually need help to re-integrate into society. Some are shunned or rejected by their own family, while some are ashamed to return home. Some have lost their identity, and do not have identity papers and other documents. The issue of their status in the country in which they are found, and the threat of being deported, is a serious legal problem to overcome.

“Social intervention and assistance needs good and thorough preparation,” Liden says. Follow-up is essential beyond the initial assistance. “Make sure that your resources allow you to provide further help.... Giving help to trafficked persons can be dangerous... tiring and frustrating,” he admits.

In the end, what informs the EBF’s involvement in the anti-trafficking campaign is its theology. Anna Maffei, who is Chair of the External Relations Division of the EBF and President of the Baptist Union in Italy, likens those who traffic in humans to those who used the Jerusalem temple for trade and money changing. The money changers and traders had turned the temple into a market, profaning it. The human body, which Paul describes as the temple of the Holy Spirit, is similarly being profaned as it is being marketed. Opposing the traffickers is akin to Jesus driving the traders and money changers out of the Jerusalem temple.
Jonah* is, in at least one respect, like many other Iraqis. He would rather the Allied forces leave his beloved country and Iraqis take control of their own affairs. But he also sees the current crisis as an opportunity presented by God for the minority Christian population to make its mark, and to make a difference.

There is at least one blessing, however small. As Sunnis and Shia fight each other, Christians, for the most part, are left alone, mainly because the overwhelmingly small numbers of believers are not seen as a threat, socially, religiously, and importantly, politically. Therefore, Christians, including those at the Baptist Church in Baghdad (BCB), can continue the work of ministry among the majority Muslim population.

When asked why he stays in Iraq rather than leaving, the 29 year old says, “I believe that God wants me to be here. My vision is to do God’s will. There are people who want to give their life to the Lord.”

Jonah’s confidence rests largely in his belief in the Iraqi people themselves. He contends that the bombings of mosques, hospitals and churches, the killing of innocent people, are not being done by his countrymen, but by non-Iraqis. “There is no tension between Muslims and Christians in Iraq,” he insists. “Most of the forces attacking churches are from outside Iraq. The people who target Iraqis are not Iraqis.” He is careful to make a clear distinction between the insurgency, the fight against the occupation forces carried out by Iraq citizens, and the many suicide bombings that take civilian lives, done by foreigners.

There are two Baptist congregations in Baghdad and five house churches in Nineveh. The small convention of the Baptist Church of Baghdad was accepted into the membership of the European Baptist Federation (EBF), which has responsibility for Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa in addition to Europe. The EBF is one of the six continental federations that make up the Baptist World Alliance.

A major thrust of the 500 member Iraqi convention is the distribution of Bibles in Arabic. Evangelism is a major activity, with visits and witnessing every Tuesday. There is discipleship training, and the distribution of their religious periodical done in conjunction with the Lebanese Baptist Society. The BCB is assisted by two missionaries sent by the EBF through their Indigenous Mission Project.

“It is time for the church to grow,” Jonah said confidently. “God allowed this situation to let people know him. It is a good time to be in Iraq,” he continued. “Students in Iraq are praying. Churches are filled with people.” As illustration, he said that in 2003, there were 40 people at worship in one congregation; now there are 240.

Baptists are involved in an intense evangelism effort. “People will not go to church if you do not go to the streets. We also give to those who have needs. Evangelism has proven effective.”

*Name changed to protect identity
In Gaza we have been under a severe siege from the sky, the land, and the sea since June 25, 2006, as the bombing of different areas continues almost nonstop. The broadcast media do not report it, and words fail to tell of the enormous suffering.

It was never like this before. The unemployment rate is more than 40 percent. Many employed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) have worked without wages for up to eight months. This makes the effective unemployment rate 70 percent.

The people are under huge pressure. Persons in their 40s are dying of heart attacks; others die young for lack of medical care and treatment.

The church is no less affected. Because of the extended conflict and siege, many Palestinian Muslims are becoming more and more militant. This puts added pressure on the Christian community. We are constantly threatened, and explosives were placed at the Gaza Bible Society. The evangelical community in Gaza is caught between three fires: the fire of the Israeli occupation, the fire of militant Muslims, and the fire of nominal Christians who are not happy with what we are doing.

But as a church, we are responding. The Gaza Baptist Church and its friends, including different Christian organizations in Gaza, have helped thousands of Palestinians with food relief, while hundreds benefited from medical assistance. We visit the refugee camps in Gaza and offer both food and spiritual blessings.

(Above right): Gaza Baptist Church after it was damaged in an attack in 2003

(Photo courtesy of Al Jazeera)
We are working as one team. We have programs for the children (Awana Club). I do leadership training for leaders from the PA and the different NGOs in the Gaza Strip, using training materials translated from English into Arabic.

There is a small extension of the Bethlehem Bible College in Gaza where theology is taught. Fifteen students are enrolled. They have access to the Culture and Light Library, operated by the Gaza Baptist Church, which received assistance from Baptist World Aid.

On November 12, we dedicated our six-storey building that houses the library, the only Christian public library in the entire Gaza Strip. There are plans to start a women’s health medical clinic on the third floor where a mammography machine will be installed. There are only about three other such machines in the whole of the Gaza Strip. The sixth floor is being used by the church for worship until, God willing, we build our church sanctuary in the near future. The other floors are used for various purposes, including the fifth floor which serves as a hostel for volunteers.

I remain in Gaza because I feel called to be here. Our friends, brothers and sisters from around the world who care about God’s work in Gaza, are a source of great encouragement. I hope and pray for stability in the region and that people will stop killing each other. I hope that the two states, Israel and Palestine, will live side by side with love and respect for each other.

It is in pain and suffering that God’s Word comes alive. We find God’s promises to be most comforting. We draw on God’s wisdom. We believe in his strength and healing. Prayer has become a real source of comfort, strength and consolation.

Hanna Massad is pastor of the Gaza Baptist Church in Palestine.

(Above): The six-storey building of the Gaza Baptist Church during construction, and (right) the library. The building was dedicated in November.
The Roma people (Gypsies), are, for the most part, at the bottom of the social ladder in Europe. Having migrated from India in the 11th century, the semi-nomadic tribes (approximately 17 tribes) are often reviled and despised. Yet Gypsy congregations are among the fastest growing on the continent.

Project Ruth, run by Otniel Bunaciu, Dean of the Baptist Faculty at the University of Bucharest in Romania, is one of the major forces behind Baptist ministry among the Gypsies. Started in 1992 by Providence Baptist Church of Bucharest, Project Ruth was initially a ministry for street children. Beginning with literacy classes, a formal school was established four years later.

The Roma peoples’ parlous state results from a combination of factors: prejudice, government and societal neglect, poor literacy, low skill levels that result in high unemployment, and a refusal or reluctance to adapt to the societies in which they reside. Spread right across Europe in such countries as Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Serbia, the largest population of 1.5 million is found in Romania. Gypsies are often characterized as “Lazy bums, thieves, and crooks,” Bunaciu said. Those who leave the community often do not want to identify themselves as Gypsies, some marrying into other races and ethnic groups.

The majority continue to wear traditional attire. Most engage in centuries long artisan and trade practices, such as making and selling crafts and pottery, and the repair of tin utensils. Because these skills are rarely needed outside of their own setting (no one repairs kitchen utensils anymore), poverty is widespread. They often move from place to place looking for jobs or to sell their wares, settling in one area only long enough to ride out the winter, and then moving on.

Prostitution is widespread among females, with young girls simply following in the footsteps of their mother. “They are susceptible to prostitution and (human) trafficking,” Bunaciu confirmed.

But over the past 10 years, Gypsies have been responding remarkably to the Gospel. There are now over one hundred Gypsy Baptist congregations in Romania alone, most consisting of groups of less than 20 persons. As a group must have more than 20 persons to be considered a ‘church’, there are only 10 ‘formal’ churches, but growth in the number of Gypsy Baptist believers is faster than the growth among ethnic Romanians.

Ministering to Gypsies is challenging, partly due to their social structure. Other models of leadership do not apply in Gypsy churches. “In their context, it is the social leader that counts,” said Bunaciu. Such a leader may be head of an extended family or tribe. “The aim is to convert the ‘social leader’,” Bunaciu said. Any person other than the leader who is pastor will have no authority. “No one will listen to him,” he asserted. When the leader is converted, others will follow, and he automatically becomes pastor of that extended family, clan, or tribe.

While the primary focus of Project Ruth is education, it also offers medical help, meals, day center activities, (Continued on next page)
Europe and the Middle East

Gypsies continued

and humanitarian aid. The school in Bucharest has 140 children enrolled, with another 100 in smaller projects in Moldova and other areas in Romania. The dedication of a new Ruth School building in Bucharest took place on October 28, 2006.

American church groups have partnered with Project Ruth. These include the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. They help to run holiday and club camps, give vocational training, teach practical skills such as sewing, as well as doing construction and maintenance work.

An important ministry initiative is the Gypsy Smith School that offers leadership training to pastors and other leaders in Gypsy churches. It covers a variety of Biblical, doctrinal and practical leadership themes. More than 80 pastors, missionaries and other leaders have been trained. The school has a staff of one – Bunaciu.

Bunaciu hopes, in the end, to create a network of leaders that will have an impact on the congregations as they grow in size and numbers. His hope is to see many more Baptist churches among the Gypsies.

The Roma peoples’ parlous state results from a combination of factors: government and societal neglect, prejudice, poor literacy, low skill levels that result in high unemployment, and a refusal or reluctance to adapt to the societies in which they reside.

In 1609 in Amsterdam, John Smyth baptized himself and then Thomas Helwys and others to form the first Baptist congregation of the modern period.
IT WAS A DIFFICULT PERIOD of history for these dissidents who, after reading scripture, came to the firm conviction that believer’s baptism was the proper mode of initiation into the Christian Church. Many were persecuted for their faith. From this small movement of early Baptist believers, the worldwide movement of Baptists has grown so that today we are one of the largest Christian groups in the world.

The Baptist World Alliance wants to properly celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Baptist movement in July 2009 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Along with the Baptist World Alliance, the European Baptist Federation will hold a mini-congress to celebrate this great occasion for European Baptists and Baptists worldwide. Tony Peck, the General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, and Emmett Dunn and I recently visited Amsterdam to find a site where we can invite many Baptists to the celebration.

We pray that our meeting in Amsterdam will be an opportunity for Baptists worldwide to meditate upon and reconsider the great Baptist principles that have united us over the years, namely: believer’s baptism, a regenerate church membership, separation of church and state, soul competency, religious liberty, the priesthood of all believers, the blessed community of born-again believers, and no creeds but Scripture. These aspects of Baptist life, of course, are shared by many other Christians, but together they uniquely describe our Baptist movement.

We pray that this celebration in 2009 will be another opportunity for Baptists to rededicate themselves to the task of world evangelization and the call of Christ to be peacemakers in a world torn by war and terrorism. As further plans are made by the BWA Commission on Baptist Heritage, we will communicate them to you. Please pray with us that this will be a great occasion for uniting Baptists worldwide.
The India Baptist Convention (IBC) is, on the scale of size, one of the smallest Baptist unions in the vast country. Its 80 churches and 5,800 members is dwarfed by the Indian Orissa Baptist Evangelical Crusade with over 2,300 churches and 400,000 members, and the Nagaland Baptist Church Council in northeast India with 1,400 churches and 414,000 members.

Yet, in terms of its ambitions, the south India Baptist group is as large as any other. Accepted as a member body of the Baptist World Alliance in July, 2006, during the BWA General Council meeting in Mexico City, its intentions are to increase the number of churches to more than one thousand by the year 2010.

The IBC has good reasons to be optimistic. At the time of its acceptance into the BWA in July, it had 65 churches. By the end of October, there were 80. Its seminary draws students from 13 states in India, and with its theme to “Unite, encourage and equip Baptist ministers and ministries,” it hopes that its 78-student body will shortly grow to 100, and that it will increase many times over thereafter.

The ambitions of the convention do not end there. A major project is the construction of a ‘children’s village’ that will house 300 children and a staff of 20. With completion aimed for February 2008, at least one building of the $600,000 project is already complete. The project is being facilitated by international partners, including the Baptist General Association of Virginia in the United States. Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, donated $100,000 in November 2006.

The children’s village is an expansion of a ministry already run by the IBC. Six hundred and fifty children are currently under its care in different parts of the country. The majority, 99 percent, come from broken homes, described by IBC Chairman Kunjumon Chacko as “Victimized by crime and crisis.” One hundred and twenty of these are in one home run by the convention.

During the devastating tsunamis in December 2004, the India Baptist Convention responded by offering shelter, medical care, drinking water, clothing, and school supplies as well as crisis care to those who suffered loss. Fishermen received fishing boats, engines and nets. The Colachal Baptist Church, which was washed away, was rebuilt.

The energy and drive of Chairman Chacko, a former businessman who ‘retired’ into full time ministry more than 30 years ago, and Executive Secretary Sabu T. Thomas, a former Marxist who has been a Christian for five years, lead them to conduct prison and hospital ministries in the mainly Hindu country. They speak highly of the liberty to preach the gospel in Kerala state, one of the few areas in India where Christian mission and evangelism can be conducted with relative freedom.

If the example of the vision, drive and energy of the IBC is anything to go by, Baptists in India have a bright future.
The Ghana Baptist Convention (GBC) is preparing to host the Annual Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance. The event, held in July each year, will meet for the fourth time on the African continent, after Kenya in 1982, Zimbabwe in 1993, and Durban, South Africa in 1998.

The GBC is planning to accommodate more than five hundred delegates in Accra, Ghana, about two hundred of whom are expected to come from the African continent itself.

This, at least, is the hope of Kojo Amo, General Secretary of the Ghana Baptist Convention. As the first West African country to host the BWA, the GBC is pulling out all the stops, hoping to draw on the resources of African Baptists to make the meetings memorable.

The greatest challenge is that of cost, and it is hoped that the spiraling price of oil, and the resultant spike in the cost of air travel, will not prevent persons, notably those outside of the continent, from attending.

The benefits of such an important meeting are not lost on Amo. Only eleven African delegates were able to attend the Annual Gathering in Mexico in July 2006. His hope is that the increased number of Africans at the Ghana meeting will get a full taste of Baptist life and what it means to be Baptist. He expects a networking of Baptists, where those in Africa may forge links with Baptists in other countries and on other continents. His dream is that the meetings will serve as good publicity for Baptists in Ghana, which now have over one thousand churches and seventy thousand members. He hopes that all who attend will experience the richness and uniqueness of Ghanaian worship.

The GBC started as the Ghana Baptist Conference in 1947 in the western region of the country. The conference replaced the Yoruba Baptist Association, which previously existed since 1935. The convention was registered in 1973.

Ghana, named formerly by the British as the Gold Coast due to its rich gold deposits, is the ancestral home of large portions of persons in the African Diaspora in North America and the Caribbean. Much of the slave route to the Americas originated in this country.

The General Secretary of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, Frank Adams, is Ghanaian.
Of all Protestant denominations, Baptists, historically, have been the most aggressive in missionary zeal.

Of Baptists throughout the world, North Americans, more than most, have led mission enterprises both on the home front, as well as internationally. None epitomizes this commitment to mission more than the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) in the United States.

BGAV conducts most of its international outreach through the Virginia Baptist Mission Board (VBMB) with partnerships that span several continents. They have formal mission arrangements with Brazil in South America, China, India and Macau in Asia, South Africa, the Caribbean, as well as with the European Baptist Federation.

Its programs include disaster relief and training, vocational training, education, summer camps, building construction and maintenance, and church planting.

The BGAV is careful to emphasize the word ‘partnership’, as it sees itself as being in a reciprocal relationship with its international partners. Therefore, while it offers disaster relief and training in the Caribbean, Virginia receives Caribbean preachers and vacation Bible school teachers.

Its mission on the home front, within the US, is no less than its international efforts. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Virginia Baptists were at the forefront in providing relief and recovery. In south Mississippi alone, 750 volunteers from 35 churches did cleanup work, rebuilding, and other activities. The state convention spent approximately $2 million in Hurricane Katrina relief.

The BGAV and the Baptist General Convention of Texas are the first two state conventions within the United States to be accepted directly into membership within the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Among the largest state bodies within the US, they join national bodies such as American Baptist Churches, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention as BWA member bodies. This was facilitated by changes in BWA bylaws that broadened its membership to churches, state conventions and individuals, in addition to national and regional conventions, unions, and federations around the world.

Jerry Jones, Team Leader with VBMB, is proud to declare Virginians ‘world Baptists’ as they are integrally part of the international family of Baptists. Baptist churches and individuals within the state, as well as the convention itself, are among the most enthusiastic supporters of the BWA and its core commitments to mission and evangelism, human rights and religious freedom, relief and development, and the unity of all Baptists globally. BGAV Executive Director John Upton chairs the Program Committee of the BWA 2010 Congress scheduled for Hawaii.

“We are grateful that Virginia Baptists are members of the BWA,” said Denton Lotz, BWA General Secretary. “Our BWA headquarters is in Virginia and we rejoice that Virginia Baptists are among the major donors to our annual budget.”
At the conclusion of the 11th Baptist Youth World Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1988, where 10,000 young people attended from around the world, a BBC reporter asked Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Denton Lotz if it was worth it.

It is always amazing, said Lotz, that when thousands of young people gather for a rock concert or a soccer match, no one asks if it was worth it, but when young people come together to proclaim that ‘Jesus Christ Rules’ (the theme of the conference), it becomes a concern of the secular media. The world is still asking that question, “Is it worth it?” The value of being a disciple of Christ is the real question.

In mid-September, 2006, more than 600 Argentine young people, some traveling by road for over 32 hours, met in the beautiful city of Rosario, Argentina, to answer the world, “Yes, it is worth it!” They represented about 30 churches that formed the Association of Baptists in Argentina (ABA), a new Baptist organization and a recent associate member of the BWA. The first of such gatherings, the emphasis was on the conviction that there is value in serving Christ. With the mixed messages that are being transmitted through popular culture, it is necessary that Christian young people send a very strong message that “Serving Christ is not a waste of time, but a discovery of the very essence of life,” said Tomas Mackey, one of the organizers.

From the opening rock concert to the closing worship service, those in attendance were challenged to step out in faith and accept the task of reaching their communities for Christ. Many of them rededicated themselves and reaffirmed their commitment to Christ.

The Baptist Convention in Argentina, like many others, is going through a very difficult period over the issue of Baptist beliefs and doctrine. The teachings of the charismatic movement have posed a challenge to some churches. This resulted in the formation of the ABA. While this meeting did not mention any controversy or criticize the doctrinal position and practices of others, it did provide an opportunity for each participant to receive a write-up of the fundamental beliefs of the Baptist faith.

Preserving the values we have held so dear throughout the years is proving to be difficult in an age when young people find meaning in each other rather than the institutional church. This was an observation of one of the pastors who was energized to see his young people respond so well to the spirit of the congress.

I experienced a sense of oneness at the gathering that says to me that if only we maintain Christ as the focus and center, young people will truly discover what it is that God is calling them to be and to do. The church can

(Continued on next page)
Alan Stanford, Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Regional Secretary for North America, has been appointed to the position of Director of Mission Advancement.

Stanford is pastor of First Baptist Church Clarendon in Arlington, Virginia, and previously served the BWA as Director of Promotion and Development (P&D) from 2001 to 2004. He replaces Ron Harris, who was the Director of the Advancement Division from July 2005 to September 30, 2006. Harris now works as a consultant with the BWA.

The Advancement Division was created at the July, 2005, centenary meetings of the BWA in Birmingham, England, and is an amalgamation of the Communications and P&D divisions.

The new incumbent is to see to the financial viability of the BWA through fundraising activities and cultivating relationships with donors. Among his major aims is the raising of funds to create a new division of freedom and justice to address violations of religious freedom and human rights around the world. Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, will also get priority attention as the international organization positions itself to even more effectively respond to disasters and engage in community development projects.

As BWA Regional Secretary for North America, Stanford leads one of the six continental fellowships that make up the BWA. The North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF) represents approximately 21 million members spread throughout the United States and Canada, and consists of 25 conventions, unions, and national Baptist organizations.

Stanford has been credited with reviving the NABF as a regional body, and is one of the major planners of a large conference of North American Baptists to be held in 2008, done in collaboration with former US President Jimmy Carter, a Baptist from the state of Georgia. A graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary, Stanford has pastored churches in Texas and Virginia.

The new Director of Mission Advancement took up the position on October 15, 2006. “I am excited to have the opportunity to return to the BWA to help financially strengthen this important ministry as it works to support Baptists around the world as they strive to share the Good News and meet pressing needs in the name of Christ,” Stanford said.

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz expresses enthusiasm at Stanford’s appointment. “Alan is one of the best networkers I know. He is a tremendous asset in relating to churches and individuals. Being General Secretary of NABF, Alan is in a unique position to solidify support of the BWA from our North American base.”

Argentine Youth continues

no longer expect young people to do church in the manner and style of the past. They are longing for meaning and relationships that deepen their faith and challenge them to world mission. This is an experiential generation. They want to have ‘hands on’ experiences and engage and be engaged in order to live out the true meaning of what it is to be a follower of Christ. On the other hand, the fundamentals of our faith must be preserved by all generations. This was the emphasis of the congress. The ABA wants to register in the minds of its young people that holding firm to what we believe as Baptists is key in understanding the values of the Church.

Prior to attending the congress, I participated in the Latin American Youth Leadership Conference held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This conference brought together youth leaders from 13 Latin American countries. The focus was mainly on networking and developing a framework for effective youth ministry.
For three days last November a most extraordinary political conference took place in the Chinese capital of Beijing.

The China-Africa summit was attended by 3,000 Africans, including 40 out of 53 African presidents and prime ministers, and was reputedly the biggest international event in Beijing since the Chinese revolution of 1949.

For three days Beijing was transformed into an African stage set. Giant placards 30 meters high adorned the streets of the capital, showing elephants, giraffes and lions set against a background of an African savannah or stunning equatorial sunset.

Included in the outcome of this historic China-Africa summit were some 14 business deals valued at $1.9 billion. In addition, the China Civil Engineering Construction Company signed with the Nigerian Government a massive $8.3 billion contract to rebuild the 1,300 kilometers of railway linking the southern city of Lagos with Kano in the north.

The doubling of Chinese aid to Africa by 2009 includes agreements for the building of Confucius Institutes which will be centers for the teaching of Mandarin across Africa. The purpose of the conference was summed up in the words of the Chinese president, Hu Jintao, at the opening ceremony. He declared that it was part of a ‘new strategic relationship’ between China and Africa.

China has made a serious commitment indicating that tomorrow belongs to Africa, and China is investing heavily to support this political philosophy. You can read on the appropriate websites some astute comments on the true motives of China, and a variety of critical observations of the immediate benefits and dangers of this ‘new strategic relationship’ for the countries of Africa.

I, too, am concerned for the future economic well-being of Africa, but this trade relationship between China and Africa provokes for me the important question – where is Africa on the spiritual radar screen of the global Church?

As Christians how do we view this mighty continent? What kind of tomorrow do we envisage for Africa?

As Christians, are we in danger of only portraying Africa as a continent of death, disaster, disease and despair, what at times has been called the 4D’s of an African apocalypse? The Economist magazine in May 2000 devoted an entire issue to what it called ‘the hopeless continent’ and fuelled a negative portrayal of Africa that is still perpetuated in the international media.

Thankfully there are campaigning journalists like Charlayne Hunter-Gault who hold out the promise of an African renaissance which challenges the way the continent of Africa is portrayed in the media. (See her book, New News out of Africa, Oxford University Press, 2006.)

Yes, there are overwhelmingly serious issues facing Africa that need our practical support, and thankfully many parts of the global family recognize the role we can all play to avert an apocalyptic scenario. But do we make every effort as Christians to also portray Africa as a rich resource of gifted Christian leaders, passionate faith-sharing believers, vibrant growing churches and courageous peacemakers?

This is the continent where you find faith-filled intercessors, inspiring preachers, imaginative evangelists, exceptional theologians, daring prophets, an abundance of young emerging leaders, and a host of creative organizers of dynamic mercy ministries.

I met some of these gifted Baptist Christians when I attended the BWA Living Water conference in Nairobi, Kenya. I have been visiting Africa for the past 20 years and this BWA conference was another reminder of the rich blessings of fellowship and inspiration you always enjoy with members of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship.

There is an infectious dynamism about African Baptists, and spending a week with these brothers and sisters was a spiritual tonic for my own ministry. Next July is a timely opportunity for the BWA family to forge a ‘new strategic relationship’ with African Baptists as we come together for our Annual Gathering in Ghana.

May I suggest a good place to begin?

Ask not what you can give to Africa – rather ask what Africa can give to you.

This is the kind of tomorrow Africa deserves.
You are cordially invited to attend the North American Celebration of the Ministry of Denton and Janice Lotz

Saturday, March 3, 2007

Hilton McLean Tysons Corner
McLean, Virginia

For reservations, please e-mail cmangieri@bwanet.org, or call +1-703-790-8980 x153