African Praise: Baptists on the Move in Africa
BWA and SBC Leaders Meet

Leaders of the Baptist World Alliance and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) held a joint meeting on December 19. The meeting was a follow up to a commitment made in April 2004 that both groups “meet at least once per year to continue an ongoing dialogue.”

In a decision to honor the commitment made in 2004, the BWA Executive Committee authorized BWA General Secretary Neville Callam to write to the SBC to request a meeting. A favorable response was received and, on December 19, the meeting took place in the offices of the SBC in Nashville, Tennessee.

The meeting was marked by cordiality, frankness and respectfulness. It was agreed that the discussion was necessary not just because of the pledge made in 2004, but also because of the vocation of Christians to live at peace with everyone.

It was noted that despite the SBC’s withdrawal of its BWA membership in 2004, a number of members of churches that cooperate with the SBC serve the BWA, including on its General Council and its study commissions.

The leaders made a commitment to keep the communication channels open, and to issue fraternal invitations to each other’s meetings.

Representing the BWA were President John Upton; Callam; George Bullard, general secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship; and Sam Chaise, general secretary of Canadian Baptist Ministries.

SBC representatives were SBC President Bryant Wright; Frank Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee; Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Paige Patterson, president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

African Praise

Nigeria, a country teeming with Baptist life, hosted the 7th Assembly of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship in November. Highlights included the election of new leaders committed to uniting Africa to fulfill the Great Commission, and messages of hope centered in God’s power for a region facing frightening problems.

Focusing on Mission & Evangelism

In this summary report from the Bread of Life Conference held in Lagos, Nigeria — geared to Francophone Africa — leaders Emmett Dunn, Neville Callam and Eron Henry stress the need for a Christ-like lifestyle, proclaiming the Gospel by making a difference in communities and countries.

Francophone Africa: Recovering From War & Instability

Eron Henry reviews the unique challenges in the violent and troubled French-speaking parts of Africa and reports on Baptists’ quest for reconciliation.

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The Baptist World Alliance is a fellowship of 222 Baptist conventions and unions comprising a membership of more than 41 million baptized believers and a community of 110 million. The BWA unites Baptists worldwide, leads in world evangelism, responds to people in need, defends human rights and promotes theological reflection.

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The Joy of Giving

Africa—what an intriguing continent! So vast, so complex, so often negatively profiled in the media! This mineral-rich continent is home to some 1.02 billion people speaking some 2,100 languages. The vast size of the continent is reflected in the fact that its geographical dimensions exceed the combined size of the USA, Europe, China, India, Argentina and New Zealand.

As is well known, it was at a conference convened in Berlin, Germany, in 1884 that colonial powers in Europe divided the African continent among themselves so that, today, the borders of many of the 54 nation states in Africa can be traced to an act of colonial decision-making. No wonder the official language of so many African countries is of European origin! Twenty of the 28 countries whose official language is French are in Africa; four of the nine countries whose official language is Portuguese can be found in Africa! One of the 23 countries with Spanish as the official language is in Africa and 17 of the 52 countries using English as their official language are also in Africa.

Notwithstanding the many obstacles encountered and the challenges present, Africa is today a continent with an outstanding record of evangelization. Since the middle of the last century, the growth of Christianity in Africa exceeds the rates recorded in every other part of the world for a comparable period of history! Today, nearly 50 percent of Africans call themselves Christians and, from Africa, almost 25,000 missioners are taking the Gospel to countries outside of their continent.

Within the BWA family, Africa hosts 59 conventions and unions with a total membership of more than nine million baptized believers and representing approximately 22.5 percent of the worldwide BWA family! Currently, we are in the process of considering six new applications for BWA membership from conventions and unions in Africa. Africa is a major player in the life of the global Baptist family.

I was privileged to share in the Assembly of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, the first such assembly I have attended. From what took place at the meetings, it seems there is growing awareness among Baptist leaders on the continent of the vital role the churches there have to play in the life of the worldwide Baptist family.

Over the years, Africa has provided the BWA with one president—William Tolbert from Liberia who served from 1965-1970. Twenty of our vice presidents have originated in Africa. They have come from South Africa and Nigeria, Cameroon, Liberia, Kenya, Zaire (Congo), Angola, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, Nigeria, Rwanda, Ghana and Tanzania have supplied BWA regional secretaries for Africa. We expect this rich tradition to continue.

Expectations are that great strides will be made especially in one additional area. Africa will want to play a more dynamic role in helping the BWA secure the funds needed for its worldwide ministry. BWA member organizations on the continent will want to contribute more financially, according to their means, to the ongoing work of the BWA.

Of course, God expects us to give as we are blessed. When we present our gifts in Christ’s service, we are not in competition with others. Our giving is proportionate to our earnings.

When we fail to give, we deprive ourselves of a blessing God wants to bestow upon us. Giving is not just a challenge; it is also an exercise in joy. None of us would want to rob ourselves of the joy of giving!

In his book, *The Spirituality of Fundraising*, Henri Nouwen states that asking people for money is “giving them the opportunity to put their resources at the disposal of the kingdom.” He also points out that gratitude “flows from the recognition that who we are and what we have are gifts to be received and shared [with others].” And isn’t he right?

As in Africa, so also in the other five regions of the BWA we wait with confidence for the day when the joy of making our contribution—not only in terms of our enormous human resources, but also financially—will issue from the experience of faithful stewardship of our responsibilities as a part of the Baptist family worldwide.
Baptists and Pentecostals Plan Dialogue

Representatives of the Baptist World Alliance and of the Pentecostal tradition met from December 13-15 to set guidelines for an upcoming international dialogue between Baptists and Pentecostals.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, who led the BWA delegation, said he “was pleased that the time had arrived in which Baptists and Pentecostals could meet to consider how they might work together in the spirit of Jesus’ prayer for the unity of the church.” Callam encouraged participants to think creatively about how, in future years, Baptists and Pentecostals might cooperate more fully in a number of areas, including mission and evangelism.

Cecil Robeck, Jr., professor of Church History and Ecumenics at Fuller Theological Seminary in the state of California in the United States, represented the Pentecostals and co-chaired the planning session with Callam. Robeck expressed delight on behalf of the Pentecostals at the invitation to open this discussion, noting that while the Pentecostal World Fellowship does not currently have in its mandate such ecumenical discussions, the chairman of that international body, Prince Guneratnam of Malaysia, has encouraged its members toward greater ecumenical openness and had given his blessings to this dialogue with the Baptist World Alliance.

The meeting, held at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, in the US, issued a statement with proposals on how a future dialogue may proceed. “The purpose of the dialogue is to examine what it may mean for Baptists and Pentecostals to walk together in step with the Holy Spirit,” the statement read. “Our intention is for the dialogue to be holistic in its evaluation of faith and practice.”

A series of questions are to be explored in any future talks. “Are there areas on which we already agree? What can we offer to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ? Who are we as we walk together? What does it mean for us to walk together? How do we walk together in the Holy Spirit?”

It is anticipated that teams will meet annually from 2012 through 2014, beginning in Quito, Ecuador, in August. Findings and recommendations for consideration by the two bodies are expected to be presented in 2015.

Members of the BWA delegation were Callam; Fausto Vasconcelos, BWA director of the Division on Mission, Evangelism, and Theological Reflection; Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School, senior editor for Christianity Today, and host of the meeting; Bill Brackney, Millard R. Cherry Distinguished Professor for Christian Thought and Ethics at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia, Canada; and Curtis Freeman, research professor of theology and director of the Baptist House of Studies at Duke Divinity School, in the state of North Carolina, in the US.

Baptists and Orthodox Hold Exploratory Talks

Teams representing the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople held exploratory talks on the island of Crete that could lead to the commencement of formal international dialogue between Baptist and Orthodox Christians.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate enjoys the status of “first among equals” among Eastern Orthodox prelates, and is widely regarded as the representative and spiritual leader of the world’s 300 million Orthodox Christians.

The two teams, which met from October 30 to November 2, reviewed earlier discussions between the BWA and the Orthodox Church and proposed that any international dialogue should be aimed at increasing mutual understanding and knowledge of each other; the exploring of a common witness to the world; and the encouragement of common action on ethical and moral issues, among other things.

“The aim of the Baptist-Orthodox dialogue is to respond to the Lord’s prayer to his Father for his disciples ‘that they may all be one . . . that the world may believe’ (John 17:21),” said BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, who led the BWA delegation.

“Facing this challenge today, we believe that we should continue to explore our common ground in biblical teaching, apostolic faith and tradition as well as practical Christian witness, together with our remaining differences.”

Callam expressed the hope that Baptists and Orthodox will be able to commit to as wide a dialogue as possible, in truth, love, mutual respect and transparency.

Participants left the meeting with the understanding that the Ecumenical Patriarchate would examine the proposal developed by the Crete meeting and determine whether to remit it to the Orthodox churches with a view to securing their participation in the proposed Baptist/Orthodox international dialogue.

The delegations shared fellowship with the Orthodox community in Crete as guests of His Eminence Archbishop Irenaeus of Crete.

Members of the BWA team were Callam; Steven Harmon, adjunct professor of Christian Theology at Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity in the state of North Carolina in the United States; and Paul Fiddes, professor of Systematic Theology at Oxford University in the United Kingdom.

The Orthodox team comprised Gennadios of Sassima of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and professor of Orthodox theology and canon law; George Tsetsis, a former permanent representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the World Council of Churches; and Konstantinos Kenanidis, general director of the Orthodox Academy of Crete.

It is expected that a decision on whether formal dialogue will take place will be made by March 2012.
Baptist World Alliance (BWA) General Secretary Neville Callam met the leadership of the two BWA member bodies in Chile in October in preparation for the next BWA Annual Gathering to be held in that country in July 2012.

Among those present at the meeting in Santiago, the Chilean capital, were Mauricio Reyes, president of the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile (UBACH), and Daniel Vivanco, president of the National Baptist Convention of Chile. Both leaders assured Callam that good progress is being made in planning the 2012 Annual Gathering. Jorge Quinteros, vice president of UBACH, is chair of the Local Arrangements Committee.

The presidents, together with representatives from both groups, discussed ways to make good use of the opportunity of hosting the Annual Gathering to benefit the local Baptist community.

South America has hosted three BWA annual meetings — in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1983 and 1995, and in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2003. Two Baptist World Congresses, which are held every five years and planned by the BWA, were held on the continent — in Rio de Janeiro in 1960 and in Buenos Aires in 1995.

Baptists in Chile are appreciative of BWA’s acceptance of their invitation to hold the next Annual Gathering in their country. The Chile local team responded positively to Callam’s request to help make the 2012 Annual Gathering reflective of local Baptist culture and ethos.

Upon his return to the BWA offices, Callam said he was impressed by the positive spirit and enthusiasm displayed at the meetings in Santiago.

His expectations are high for another memorable experience at a BWA Annual Gathering.

Leaders of the major Christian bodies met at the international offices of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) on October 19.

The Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions, comprising mainly general secretaries and other chief executive officers of the major Christian bodies around the world, together with other leaders of global church fellowships, were guests of BWA General Secretary Neville Callam. Callam made a brief presentation on Baptist life and witness and provided information on the major values that form the focus of the ministry of the BWA.

The visit to the BWA by the 28-person delegation, including Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), occurred during the annual meeting of the Conference of Secretaries held at offices of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland, close to Washington, DC. Meetings of the Conference of Secretaries are held in a different part of the world each year.

The secretaries shared practical and common concerns, including issues surrounding the planning of international conferences, such as visa restrictions, as well as evangelism, religious freedom, justice and peace issues.

From left, Larry Miller, general secretary of the Global Christian Forum, Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Patsy Davis, director of the BWA Women’s Department.
Ties between the Baptist World Alliance and the China Christian Council (CCC) were further strengthened during a visit of CCC leaders to the offices of the BWA on October 3.

Both organizations have had a long association with each other. Since the 1980s, representatives of the CCC have attended Baptist World Congresses, held by the BWA every five years, including the last congress in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, in 2010. A BWA team, led by former President David Coffey, was hosted by the CCC on a visit to China in January 2010, the most recent of several visits made by the BWA to China over the past several decades. In May 2006, the leadership of the CCC, led by then president Cao Shenjie, visited the BWA offices.

The Chinese were in the United States for a 50-day tour as part of the Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Protestant Church in China. The exhibition was a display of historic and artistic Bibles, objects of art, and cultural performances. The tour involved travels to Washington, DC, Chicago in Illinois, Dallas in Texas, and Charlotte in North Carolina.

BWA President John Upton and General Secretary Neville Callam attended the opening ceremony of the exhibition in Washington, DC, on September 28.

The first Chinese Bible Ministry Exhibition was hosted by the BWA in 2004 during the Baptist Youth World Conference in Hong Kong. Other exhibitions were held in Los Angeles, Atlanta and New York in the US in 2006 and in Germany in 2007.

“This group of [Chinese leaders] represents the younger generation of China,” CCC President Gao Feng told the BWA staff in introducing members of the Chinese delegation. “Our predecessors maintained a good and productive relationship with your organization in the past. We hope that this relationship can be furthered even more.”

The Bible exhibition, Gao said, “serves as an entry point and helps to strengthen existing relationships…. This also allows for constructive dialogue about different forms of ministry and ways to develop theological education. All of these ideas can be taken back to help the Church in China.”

Raimundo Barreto, speaking on behalf of Callam, praised the Chinese Bible Exhibition. “Hearing what Chinese Christians are doing with the Bible is very encouraging to the rest of us,” he said.

Other members of the 13-member Chinese delegation included Kan Baoping, CCC general secretary, and Ou Enlin, deputy director of the Overseas Relations Department of CCC and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China.

The CCC was founded in 1980 as an umbrella organization for all Protestant churches in China, including those with historical Baptist roots. It is involved in a number of ministerial activities, including Bible and Christian literature publishing through Amity Printing Press, reported to be the largest Bible publisher in the world; education, social services, health and rural development through the Amity Foundation; and ministerial and theological training through 18 theological seminaries and Bible schools.
The Baptist World Alliance participated in the second global gathering of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) that was held in Manado, Indonesia, from October 4-7. The first gathering was held in Limuru near Nairobi, Kenya, in November 2007.

First begun in the late 1990s, the forum brings together Christians from confessional, ecumenical, evangelical, and Pentecostal/charismatic movements from across denominational, regional, ethnic and cultural boundaries. It includes members of the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pentecostal World Fellowship, in addition to parachurch organizations. The GCF creates “a ‘space’ where participants all meet on an equal basis, to foster mutual respect, and to explore and address together common concerns.”

Following the GCF meeting in Kenya, the book, Revisioning Christian Unity – The Global Christian Forum, was published. A strategic planning meeting was held in November 2008 to implement the recommendations of the Limuru gathering, taking into account the results of the evaluation.

Fausto Vasconcelos, the BWA Director of the Division on Mission, Evangelism and Theological Reflection, and John Kok, a BWA vice president, represented the BWA at the meetings in Indonesia. Discussions focused on changes in world Christianity as well as on the vision and direction of the GCF.

Other Baptists representing their own national or regional Baptist organizations as well as ecumenical groups attended the meetings. These included David Vidyatama of the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches, Guntur Subagyo of the Indonesian Baptist Alliance, Gold O. Anie of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, Mouner Al Ajji from the Syria Convention of Evangelical Baptist Churches, Jonathan Malone of American Baptist Churches USA, and William Shaw of the National Baptist Convention, USA.

Top: Delegates who attended the Global Christian Forum in Manado, Indonesia, in October
Below, left & right: Participants at the opening session at the Global Christian Forum in Indonesia
(Photos courtesy of the Global Christian Forum)
Baptist World Alliance (BWA) President John Upton and General Secretary Neville Callam were among approximately 300 religious leaders who gathered in Assisi in Italy to participate in the Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World.

The event was held on October 27 and was hosted by Pope Benedict XVI. It marked the 25th anniversary of a similar event called by Pope John Paul II in 1986 in the birth and burial place of St. Francis of Assisi, whose life was marked by a commitment to peace and reconciliation.

“We had an invitation to be part of the world gathering and felt that Baptists should be in the midst of the celebration,” said Upton. “It was good for Baptists to be there. They needed us there and we needed to be there. We’re going to be good neighbors without compromising our core convictions. We can do this while holding to our evangelical convictions.”

Callam said the event was significant because a commitment to peace can only lead to improved relations. “The attitude that people of the various religions adopt toward one another has vast potential for ameliorating conflict between peoples,” he said. “The meeting convened by the pope in Assisi reflected the concern for peace shared by all religions. As Baptist Christians, we continue to commit ourselves to honoring our Lord’s command to love our neighbors.”

Activities of the day included speeches by some of the religious leaders, a time of silence dedicated to personal prayer and/or reflection, the sharing of a “frugal” or “poor” meal intended to be a symbolic participation in the sufferings of persons and populations deprived of peace, and a solemn renewal of the pledge of peace.

In the pledge of peace, participants promised to reject violence and terrorism; to foster a culture of dialogue that is frank and patient; to defend the right of everyone to live a decent life; to take the side of the poor and the helpless, speaking out for those who have no voice; to encourage all efforts to promote friendship between peoples; and to forgive each other for past and present errors and prejudices.

It was worthwhile that religious leaders could come together and “instead of being symbols of destruction, be symbols of peace and unity,” Upton said.

By Daniel Trusiewicz

The European Baptist Federation has been supporting several church planting projects in Tajikistan in Central Asia. It was only toward the end of the 20th century that this nation received the Bible in its own language for the first time. The Word of God was distributed and read by the people, which eventually resulted in the planting of new churches.

Tajikistan declared political independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The nation fell into civil war which was tribally based and lasted seven years (1991-97). The dreadful fruit of this war has been death and destruction – in total about 60,000 victims. In addition, the majority of the non-Muslim population, particularly Russians, Germans and Jews, fled the country during that time, mainly because of persecution and increasing poverty.

Baptist work started in Dushanbe, Tajikistan’s capital, in 1929. The new converts formed a congregation but the authorities closed the church. After many appeals the government registered the church in 1944.

In 1989 the Dushanbe Baptist Church had more than 800 members with almost half being German. The congregation included as many as 16 national groups. In addition to the Dushanbe church, Baptists formed several other congregations in the country.

The Baptist Brotherhood of Tajikistan comprises seven congregations and several affiliate groups that are scattered all over the country. This Baptist community counts an increasing number of ethnic Tajiks. The ministry concentrates on evangelism, mission and church planting. During the past 10 years the number of churches and groups has doubled, and thousands of Bibles in the Tajik language have been distributed.

The majority of new converts do not have a Christian background. They learn about the Baptist faith in discipleship courses through extension training. Baptists organize summer camps and Vacation Bible Schools. There is also work with children in boarding schools. The Extension Bible School serves as an effective tool in preparing for ministry and it is organized in cooperation with Romanian and Moldovan Baptists.

(Continued on next page)
Baptists of Tajikistan continued

Young Tajik leaders are beginning to emerge who are trying to start new congregations. Indigenous church planters lead several groups under the oversight of the Baptist Church of Dushanbe. One person completed an Inductive Bible Study course and his goal is to start a new Tajik-speaking group. He has organized a church planting team which includes 25 people who meet in two subgroups and are members of the existing Baptist church. An EBF team traveled to visit an indigenous missionary who works in a Tajik city near the border with Uzbekistan. The distance we had to travel was relatively short, only about 300 kilometers, but the trip took nine hours and included passage over two mountain passes. We were in a jeep going through the high mountains, crossing a seven kilometer long tunnel and the most demanding mountain pass that is more than 3,500 meters above sea level. The highest part of the road is simply naked rocks and there are no safety barriers. The slopes are steep and deep. Finally, we met our guide who is a local Christian evangelist. He explained that the basic method of ministry is to share the gospel with members of his extended family. He usually starts with a man who is the head of a family and the others usually follow.

The Baptists of Tajikistan are grateful for prayers and support for their ministry. They appreciate being part of a large family of faith.

Please pray for the successful work of indigenous church planters in Tajikistan. Pray also for the spiritual openness of local people as they read the Bible in their own language. Pray too for the formation of leaders who will be able to conduct Christian ministry among the Tajik people.

Daniel Trusiewicz is the mission coordinator for the European Baptist Federation and has responsibility for the EBF’s Indigenous Mission Project.

Virginia Baptists Forge Multi-dimensional Approach to Reach University Students & Young Adults

By Carey Sims

The Virginia Baptist Mission Board (VBMB) of the Baptist General Association of Virginia is committed to advancing God’s Kingdom through innovation and collaborative partnerships. One such example is the new Kairos Initiative, which aims to connect churches, youth ministers, seminaries and interested lay people with local organizations and ministries on college and university campuses so that together, they might engage young adults in building God’s Kingdom as they grow closer to Jesus.

The VBMB supports Baptist Collegiate Ministries (BCM) at a number of campuses around the state, but realizes the need for a multi-layered approach to reach this age demographic. The initiative seeks to create a network of local partners to reach all types of young adults, including those who may be enrolled in community colleges, vocational or technical schools, or who are in the military or workforce. Through shared resources and mutual responsibility, Virginia Baptists hope to create a culture of discipleship that fosters a deep sense of community, where young adults will become equipped to serve their community and the world out of their unique gifts and passions.

Virginia Baptist Collegiate Ministers, who staff the BCMs across the state, are encouraged by the VBMB to foster creative expressions of worship and mission to reach a generation of young adults who are less likely to have any contact or prior engagement with the Christian faith.

At The University of Virginia, Baptist students were encouraged to act as missionaries on their campus. In doing so, they read the cultural context of the university and identified the artist community as a group that was not only overlooked by other Christian ministries, but also by the university. The BCM began to pray about how they could use their building to create space for artists on campus and in the local community. Their prayers were answered when a Hindu student approached them with a desire to serve as a curator for what has become a student art gallery and performance space. Over the past two years, thousands of students and members of the local community have come into contact with the BCM through monthly concerts and gallery openings. Most of these people had very little knowledge or interaction with Christians prior to their experience with this collegiate ministry. BCM Collegiate Minister Evan Hansen observes that “by honoring an underserved group of people, this Hindu student has begun to make the connection between her participation with this project and the life of Jesus. She is being invited to walk the way of Jesus first, rather than hearing about the Gospel first as a disembodied concept.”

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is an urban campus, located in downtown Richmond, where the student population is incredibly diverse and representative of many religious identities. Two years ago BCM Collegiate Minister Nathan Elmore initiated a Holy Book Conversation which brings Muslim and Christian students together for interfaith dialogue. His motivation for this is deeply theological, first to recognize each person as created in the image of God and secondly, to demonstrate the Christian virtue of hospitality, where genuine friendships can be formed.

Virginia Baptists empower their BCM leaders to view the campus as a mission field, taking adequate time to observe the particular needs of students in their context. They have been encouraged to use their gifts and passions to stir the passions of others so that future leaders may learn to trust the gifts of God in them. New BCM leaders at The University of Mary Washington are focused on discipleship and leadership development. They have identified a small group of students, some devoted followers of Jesus and others dedicated seekers of truth and meaning, but who display a desire to learn and the capacity to lead. The BCM leaders perceive the need to engage students at all levels of their spiritual journey by creating an environment of hospitality where questions are welcomed. Answers do not come quickly, but trust is built through honest conversations in hopes that authentic relationships will be formed for the sake of Christ.

Carey Sims is the Baptist Collegiate Minister at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia in the United States.
Haitian Baptist Leader Kidnapped, Released Unharmed

Emmanuel Pierre, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of Haiti (BCH), was kidnapped in the wee hours of Thursday, September 22, in Cap-Haïtien, the second largest city in Haiti, and the city where the convention offices are located.

He was released unharmed later in the day.

Several armed men reportedly broke into his home and took the Haitian Baptist leader by force, and demanded a ransom for his release.

Gedeon Eugene, president of the convention, negotiated with the kidnappers and told the Baptist World Alliance that Haitians prayed for the speedy and safe release of the Haitian Baptist leader. While Pierre was being held, BWA General Secretary Neville Callam assured Haitian Baptists of the prayers of Baptists around the world for the safe return of Pierre to his family and friends.

Pierre was released at approximately 5:00 p.m. on September 22. No ransom was paid.

“We are glad to inform you that Rev. Emmanuel Pierre was safely released,” Joel Dorsinville, coordinator for disaster relief for the BCH, told the BWA. “He is now back home with his family. Thank you all for your support in prayers.”

“We do praise the Lord. Let us continue to pray for him and his family,” said Jules Casseus, president of the Northern Haiti Christian University, which is owned by the BCH.

“It is with joy that we receive news that Emmanuel has returned safely to his family,” Callam said. “We thank God for God’s grace and protection upon our brother and express appreciation to Baptists around the world who prayed along with our Baptist brothers and sisters in Haiti.”

“We join with family, friends and the Baptist community in celebrating the safe release of the Rev. Emmanuel Pierre,” wrote Everton Jackson, BWA regional secretary for the Caribbean and executive secretary/treasurer for the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship.

Indonesia

Baptists Convene Unity Congress

The Indonesian Baptist Alliance (IBA), comprising eight Baptist groups in the Southeast Asian country, including a number of Baptist World Alliance member bodies, held its 5th Congress in Sorong, West Papua, from September 21-25, 2011.

Papua, unlike most other areas in Indonesia, is 60 percent Christian, with Baptists being the second largest Christian group in the province. Indonesia, the most populous Islamic country in the world with a total of 237 million people, is more than 87 percent Muslim.

IBA describes itself as “a national stream of Baptists which is registered and officially accepted by the government of the Republic of Indonesia. Our Baptist churches (more than 1,000 churches) are located all over Indonesia, from west to the east, from Aceh to Papua.”

Activities held at the congress included revival meetings; workshops for pastors, youth, men, women, children and professionals; public seminars; a cultural festival; and a special World Day of Prayer session.

Subjects covered in the various sessions included conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, the Christian family, Christianity in Indonesia, and globalization.

Participants included Patsy Davis, executive director of the BWA Women’s Department; Bonny Resu, BWA regional secretary for Asia and general secretary of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation; and Julie Belding, president of the Baptist Women’s Union of the South West Pacific.

Davis led sessions based on the book I’m a Woman...Created in the Image of God during which she spoke on the special place that women hold in relation to God, having been created in God’s image and likeness.

Resu was keynote speaker at the opening session of the congress where approximately 2,200 were in attendance.

A new team of leaders for the IBA was elected to serve until 2014. Perinus Kogoya of the Papua Baptist Churches Fellowship was elected president; Guntur Subagyo of the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches (UIBC), director; Johni Mardisantosa of the UIBC, secretary; and JM Raso of the Independent Baptist Churches was elected treasurer.
The All Africa Baptist Fellowship held its 7th Assembly from November 16-20 at the Shepherdhill Baptist Church in Lagos, Nigeria, in a part of the country that seems to teem with Baptist life. The AABF is one of six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance and has the second largest membership in the global Baptist organization, comprising 9.4 million members in more than 35,000 churches, or approximately 22 percent of BWA membership.

The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), host of the assembly, proudly declares itself the third largest Baptist convention or union in the world and the second largest within the BWA, with 3.5 million members in 10,000 churches. The convention, constituted in 1914 after the first Baptist church was planted in the early 1850s, boasts 10 theological seminaries and a university of 4,500 students, in addition to hospitals and clinics in more than 15 cities and villages. NBC also runs a Baptist press and several thousand schools in more than 20 cities and villages.

There was a strong Nigerian flavor to the assembly in leadership, worship, styles of dress, and logistical support through active participation by NBC leaders, lively musical praise, colorful attire, and the provision of meals, transportation and accommodation.

New Leadership

One of the more significant events at the Lagos meeting was the election of Isaac Durosinjesu Ayanrinola as AABF general secretary. Ayanrinola has served the NBC in various capacities since 2003, and at the time of his AABF appointment, was serving as director of the Missionary Organization Department of that body. He succeeds Harrison Olan’g, vice chancellor of Mount Meru University in Tanzania, who was elected in 2007 to serve as acting general secretary following the death of AABF General Secretary Frank Adams of Ghana.

Ayanrinola holds bachelor’s degrees from the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomoso and the American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee, in the United States, and Master of Divinity and Doctor of Missiology degrees from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky in the US.

In his response following his election, Ayanrinola said his objectives for the AABF are the fostering of unity, the mobilizing of resources, networking for effective communication, and connecting
“rich opportunity with rich resource.” The overall aim, he said, is uniting African Baptists “to fulfill the Great Commission.”

The NBC is providing housing and an office for the AABF general secretary at full cost for the next four years.

Ayanrinola will be presented to the Executive Committee of the BWA for confirmation as BWA regional secretary for Africa.

Michael Okwakol, senior pastor of Agape Baptist Church in Kampala, Uganda, founder and president of African Church Empowerment Ministries, and immediate past chairman of the Eastern sub region of the AABF, was elected AABF president. He succeeds Paul Msiza, a vice president of the BWA, chair of the Local Arrangements Committee for the 2015 Baptist World Congress to be held in Durban, South Africa, and former general secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa.

Okwakol shared three imperatives that the AABF should follow. Like Ayanrinola, he made a plea for unity. “God is concerned that we be one,” he told the gathering of African Baptist leaders and delegates. He said also that the AABF, its leaders and members should be engaged in service. “We are servants,” he said. The goal should be to “work for all people. There are no chiefs out there.” The new AABF president made a call for African Baptists to be an example to others in their communities and countries. “When we do, they will do what we say,” he declared.

Two vice presidents were elected, Enoch B. Dusingizimana, president and general secretary of the Community of Christian Churches in Africa, based in Rwanda, and Angelo Scheepers, founder and president of

Above: Michael Okwakol of Uganda, new AABF president
Moses Adebayo, finance director of the NBC, was elected as treasurer for the AABF.

A special assembly is to be held in a country in Central Africa in 2012 to vote on amendments to the region’s constitution. A constitutional review committee is to be formed by the new AABF executive to continue the work on constitutional amendment ahead of the special assembly.

The AABF received resolutions requesting that it be constitutionally mandated that at least one of the AABF vice presidents be female, following on the less than adequate representation by women on the executive; and that the AABF assembly be held every three years instead of every five years.

A third resolution called for the adoption of South Sudan as a mission field. This follows on an earlier resolution passed by the BWA in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in July 2011, encouraging Baptist bodies to engage in partnerships with Baptists in the country in order to strengthen Christian witness in South Sudan. South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan last July.

The Importance of Evangelism

A key participant in the AABF assembly was BWA General Secretary Neville Callam who, among other things, was keynote speaker at the closing service where he and Msiza installed the new AABF leadership that was elected at the assembly.

In an address at one of the meetings earlier in the week, Callam spoke of the BWA’s evangelism emphasis through the Bread of Life program, which is a follow-up on the BWA’s Living Water evangelism emphasis between 2005 and 2010. “The calling to do the work of evangelism is an urgent one,” Callam told the gathering. He hoped the program will help Baptists to clarify their understanding of mission and evangelism, maintain focus on Jesus Christ, and commit to a holistic understanding of ministry through word and deed.

It is the church’s responsibility, Callam asserted, “to carry out the Great Commission so that Jesus, the Bread of Life, may nourish and enrich the people of every nation.” In telling and showing the world “the wonders of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,” the church, he said, should be engaged in “feeding the poor, healing the sick, and offering a prophetic critique of those powers and structures that keep people from experiencing life in its fullness.”

Hope Amidst Crisis

Several other speakers spoke to the challenges facing Africa as well as the hope that Africans have.

Outgoing AABF President Msiza, in giving the presidential address, acknowledged that Africa faces political instability in a
number of countries, and suffers from corrupt leadership and the oppression of minority and marginal groups. He emphasized that the days of blaming colonizers for Africa’s problems are long past, “because we are independent for too long to be blaming colonial powers.”

He admitted that many problems are external to African nations, including the recent global economic and financial crises and the effects of the problems in the euro zone on Africa. He bemoaned widening commercialization, “including the commercialization of our humanity,” and that “the world has lost what it is to come together as a community.”

But despite all these problems, Africa and Africans have a bright future. “Even when the world seems to be falling apart, God is still in control, God is on the throne, God is still Lord of Lords,” stated Msiza.

Reuben Chuga, president of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Kaduna, Nigeria, the keynote speaker at the opening service on the night of November 16, said that Africa is, at this time, “in a frightening place because of all the problems,” yet Africans should not be afraid “because God is powerful, yet personal.” He indicated that many are afraid because of their troubling situation and because of an uncertain future, but persons can overcome fear if they recall that God knows our situation, God knows and controls tomorrow, and that God gives second chances.

Bible study presenter Jerry Akinsola of the NBC said that the continent is suffering from corruption, wars, famine, diseases, and illiteracy, among other concerns, and that if Africa is to fulfill its potential, “the church of Jesus Christ must be in the forefront. We must hear the Spirit and respond to the cry of the captives calling us to come to their ‘Macedonia.’” He insisted that “the church that is not moved by the needs of men or the plight of the oppressed is either not hearing the Spirit or it is resisting the Spirit.”

Olorunnimbe Mamora, a senator in Nigeria’s parliament and a member of Christ Baptist Church in Lagos, declared that though parts of Africa are under siege and are suffering from strife and poverty, Christians, as light of the world, can and ought to make a difference in the lives of persons.

Msiza said that the AABF “is on the rise.” He noted the great work being done by the women’s and youth departments of the regional body, and encouraged the men’s department to become more active and involved.

He said that more work needs to be done by the regional body to help strengthen weaker sub regions within Africa and that the organization should establish a department devoted to children’s ministry.

As leaders and delegates departed Lagos, there was a sense of hope that African Baptists will become an even more formidable force on the global scene.
Baptists should engage in deeds of mercy and address justice issues, and not merely verbally proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, said Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam and Emmett Dunn, director of the BWA Youth Department.

Both Callam and Dunn led discussions at the Bread of Life Conference (BOL) in Lagos, Nigeria, on November 15. BOL is an international evangelism training program sponsored by the BWA. The meetings in Lagos were specially geared to Baptist leaders and delegates from Francophone Africa.

Callam, in referring to Jesus’ self-designation as the Bread of Life, said that while the preaching of the Word is important, Baptists should give heed to the “proclamation of the Gospel in life through deeds of mercy and the kinds of things we do in our churches.”

Dunn implored Baptist Christians to make a difference in the lives of their communities and countries. He noted that 95 percent of the people of Rwanda regard themselves as Christians, yet the country descended into genocidal chaos in 1994 when more than 800,000 people were killed in a matter of weeks.

Dunn also made reference to his native country of Liberia in West Africa, whose population is more than 85 percent Christian, yet the country underwent decades of civil war that cost thousands of lives, devastated families, and destroyed countless properties.

“Evangelism must be about the truth of the gospel and not just about planting churches and increasing the number of regular Sunday worshippers,” Dunn challenged the audience. “The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ must have an impact on the lives of those who respond to the Great Commission. It must be reflected in the way we relate to our Muslim neighbors as well as how we respond to issues that affect us politically as well as socially.”

African Christianity, Dunn said, is experiencing rapid numerical growth. In 1900 there were nine million Christians in Africa. In 2000, that figure rose to 380 million, and is expected to reach 600 million by 2025. “With this kind of growth, it is easy to believe that all is going well with the church in Africa.” But Dunn indicated that “the lack of a Christ-like lifestyle in dealing with matters of politics, ethnic tension and social challenges” needs to be urgently addressed by African Christians.

In confronting these pressing issues, the BWA youth leader urged Baptists on the continent to...
pay keen attention to the evangelism mandate of Mark 16:16, the discipleship mandate of Matthew 28:19-20, the missiological mandate of John 17:18, and the global mandate of Acts 1:8.

Christians and churches, he said, should commit themselves to evangelism, the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God; to discipleship, teaching, baptizing and nurturing new believers in the ways of the kingdom; to serving people in need through love and compassion; and to justice, seeking to transform unjust structures in society. The church, Dunn declared, should remember that “the call to reach out and seek the lost, the least, the last and the left out is not optional.”

Eron Henry, who has responsibility for BWA Communications, guided participants to examine various models in mission and evangelism used by various Baptist groups around the world. Ukraine adopted an integrated approach where congregations, associations, and the national union all have a similar structure and program that draw on, and feed into each other. Cuba’s congregations divide into zones, which are then divided into cells, and cells grow and multiply until a new church is created in that zone out of the growth of cells. The European Baptist Federation partners with unions and local churches through its Indigenous Mission Project to identify and place indigenous missionaries to plant churches.

One model that seems to work well, according to Henry, is “enabling people to lift their social standards and improve their living conditions, while preaching the Gospel to them.” He identified “the provision of education and healthcare by building schools, hospitals and health clinics, and by providing other social amenities,” as “a most effective way to reach marginalized groups.”

Henry said that living an exemplary Christian lifestyle is particularly effective in reaching peoples of other faith traditions – such as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and adherents of traditional religions – “especially the way Christians treat others who are not of their own household or family with love, kindness and mercy.”

Delegates at the conference were encouraged to share models of mission and evangelism used in their own contexts and to determine, where possible and appropriate, if any of the seven models that Henry shared were applicable in theirs.

In a statement issued at the close of the conference, delegates expressed gratitude for the special consideration given to Francophone Africa, which does not always feel included. “We have been edified by the various presentations,” the statement read.

The delegates implored the BWA to help “strengthen the capacity of leaders on new approaches or methods relating to the work of mission and evangelism; to facilitate partnership relations between churches of the West and those of Africa; and to facilitate the financing of evangelization like social and development projects.”

The BOL conference preceded the start of the 7th Assembly of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, which was held from November 16-20.
Baptists in Francophone or French-speaking Africa have had to contend with serious, often severe, social and political upheavals that lead to protracted problems. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a huge country (larger than all of Western Europe) with massive amounts of natural resources, has experienced the costliest war in human lives since World War Two. An estimated 5.4 million people have died as a result of fighting, starvation, diseases and other consequences of the Second Congo War, which began in 1998. Many deaths continued to occur even after the war officially ended in 2003. Millions more have been displaced in other countries. The DRC has nine groups that are member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance, the largest number of organizations from any one country in Africa, with a total of more than 1.5 million members. The largest, with more than one million members, is the Baptist Community of the Congo River. Rwanda underwent a horrendous genocide in 1994 that claimed more than 800,000 lives over a period of just over 100 days, the culmination of longstanding ethnic competition and tensions between the minority Tutsi, who had held power for centuries, and the majority Hutu peoples. More than 350,000 Baptist members in three BWA member organizations are in Rwanda. Burundi underwent a civil war that lasted 12 years, from 1993 through to 2005, due to protracted conflicts between Tutsis and Hutus. An estimated 300,000 persons have been killed as a result. The Union of Baptist Churches in Burundi numbers more than 35,000 members. The Central African Republic (CAR) has had a turbulent history marked by conflicts and political upheavals with thousands of displaced persons fleeing to other countries due to clashes between government and rebel forces, mainly in the north. Some 135,000 Baptists are part of the three BWA groups in the CAR. The Civil War in Chad began in 2005 between the Arab Muslims of the north and the Sub-Saharan Christians of the south. This is the latest of the four civil wars that have occurred in the landlocked country since 1965.

The Consequences of War

Kakule Molo, president of the Baptist Community in Central Africa (CBCA) in the DRC, which has approximately 200,000 members, said the war had a devastating effect on his country. The result has been a huge loss of life, violence, widespread poverty, deepening illiteracy, and inadequate healthcare. In pointing out that the DRC is possibly the most resource rich country on the planet, Molo, who was elected to the country’s parliament in 2005 and served until the end of 2011, said, “We are one of the richest countries in the world yet we are plagued by poverty.” Congo is rich in diamonds and other mineral wealth. Approximately 70 percent of the minerals that are needed for cell phones and laptops, such as tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold, are found only in eastern Congo, where most Baptists reside. “We have the second largest rainforest in the world, next to the Amazon,” Molo explained. “What caused the war is our richness because everyone would like to get involved in the exploitation of our resources.” There are people, he said, “who are destabilizing the Congo, not just from outside, but Congolese themselves.” Matters are complicated because the DRC is such a massive country.

The church, he explained, is determined to step into the

War had a devastating effect . . . a huge loss of life, violence, widespread poverty, deepening illiteracy, and inadequate healthcare.
breach and is focusing on two areas in particular, education and health.

The CBCA operates more than 400 primary and secondary schools and started a university. The education of females, or the lack thereof, is of particular concern. “Large families, those with five or six children, cannot afford to send all the children to school. The tendency is to send the boys. The result is that we have more girls who are not going to school and who are illiterate,” Molo said.

Women are especially vulnerable as they suffered most during the war and in its aftermath. Molo agreed with a July 2011 Baptist World Alliance resolution on “conflict minerals” from the DRC, which described the country as “the most dangerous place in the world to be a woman or a girl.”

“Up until now, women continue to be massively raped due to the presence of armed groups, both local and foreign groups from Uganda and Rwanda.”

The CBCA runs 150 medical centers, five of which are hospitals with a count of between 80 and 150 beds each.

The reason for the focus on education and health is simple. Many of these facilities were destroyed during the war. “Whenever we move into a particular area, we immediately get in touch with the needs of the local people,” said Molo. It so happens that the lack of schools and healthcare centers are among the most urgent. “This is the reason why we have so many schools and medical centers. Wherever we go to start a church, it is likely that around that church will be a school and medical center to take care of the needs of the people.”

The Quest for Reconciliation

Burundi is still trying to recover from its own civil war. The Union of Baptist Churches in Burundi (UBCB) is working to help integrate back into the community rebels and the child soldiers that fought alongside them during the 13-year war. Thus far, approximately 100 child soldiers have been rehabilitated, many becoming Christians and active within their churches. Juvenal Nzosaba, general secretary of the UBCB, said that they provide training in auto mechanics, carpentry and plumbing for many of these rebels.

“There is need for reconciliation. Peace and reconciliation is important,” Nzosaba elaborated. The union responded to the government’s appeal for churches to be engaged in the healing process for the country. “Some of our pastors serve on local reconciliation committees,” the Burundi Baptist leader stated. “We participate in seminars. The church is exploring ways to peace, reconciliation and justice.”

Churches in Burundi, he said, are learning from the experiences of Rwanda and South Africa, which had instituted their own reconciliation programs after the genocide in 1994 and the apartheid era, respectively.

At the same time, Baptists, who were the first Protestant group to be established in Burundi and, according to Nzosaba, the largest Protestant church in the nation, are working to help displaced persons who have come in mainly from the DRC, Kenya and Tanzania, providing basic services such as clean drinking water.

Baptists in the Central African Republic (CAR) also see the need to reach out to their fellow citizens through social services. The 62,000-member Association of Evangelical Baptist Churches (AEBC) of the CAR, which was formed in 1954, operates three elementary schools and three health centers, and offers counseling to those affected by war. A focus of Baptists in the country is unity, according to Nicolas Aime Simplice Singa-Gbazia, president of the AEBC, and Esaie Foungala, executive secretary of the Baptist Churches Union of the CAR. All 10 Baptist groups in the nation, they said, including all four BWA member bodies, have joint meetings and seminars, and are moving toward forming a fellowship organization for closer cooperation.

Baptist leaders in Francophone Africa are anxious that their countrymen and Baptists in particular, take responsibility for their nation. “We are exploring self-funding initiatives,” Nzosaba said. “We have to encourage our own people to contribute.”

Molo, while acknowledging that the DRC’s colonial history has played a role in the recent and current troubles faced by his country, refused to give Congolese a free pass. “Historically, what we are experiencing now is what we have experienced from colonial times. But personally, I prefer to do my best not to think in terms of the past. I think 50 years of independence should lead to the education of our own people. We need to take responsibility to get rid of any negative elements of what we inherited from colonial times.”

In response to these tumultuous upheavals, Baptists have been engaged in helping to bring healing and development in their country. Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, working through various BWA member bodies, has funded HIV/AIDS, agricultural, and displaced persons resettlement projects in the DRC alone. Baptists in Rwanda, through assistance from BW Aid, have helped to bring various groups together to help move the country forward.
Aiming for Higher Education

African Baptists have, over the past several decades, been placing greater emphasis on higher education, beyond merely running elementary and secondary schools. In addition to seminaries for pastors, Baptist conventions and unions have established four year colleges and graduate degree granting institutions.

The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) established Bowen University in Iwo, Osun State. After obtaining final government approval in 2001, the school opened in November 2002 with an initial enrollment of 500 students.

According to B. Uche Enyioha, president of the NBC and a former seminary president, Bowen has been ranked as one of the top two private universities in Nigeria. Bowen, named after the American missionary that started Baptist work in the country in the 1850s, now has 4,500 students in three faculties—Agriculture, Science and Science Education, and Social and Management Studies.

“Students who attend Bowen University find it to be a place where they can grow academically, morally and spiritually, in a Christian environment,” says university Vice Chancellor Timothy Olagbemiro.

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam visited Bowen University in November 2010 where he delivered the school’s Convocation Lecture, titled “Leadership: Crisis and Opportunity.” Delivered before the university and civic community, the convocation is held the day before the Graduation Exercise. The lecture was followed by a tour of the Bowen campus, including its 5,000-seat chapel. Callam also attended a prayer meeting convened by the Bowen University Council, where he presented greetings.

The Ghana Baptist University College (GBUC) was formed by the Ghana Baptist Convention in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of the West African country.
Established in November 2006, the school has been granted accreditation by Ghana’s National Accreditation Board and has two campuses—one in Amakom, a suburb of Kumasi, and the second at Abuakwa at Atwima Mponua, the westernmost district in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The Ghana Baptist Theological Seminary at Abuakwa is part of the new university.

The college has four schools—Nursing, Business Administration, Information and Communication Technology, and Theology. Its vision “is to be a center of excellence for creative teaching and learning, innovative and relevant research, professional competence, and godly ethics in academic disciplines from a biblical Christian worldview.” It is working “to educate, develop, train, and mentor men and women who will excel in influencing and impacting society through integration of academic learning and Christian faith.”

College President Kwadwo Osei-Wusuh says that GBUC is “a place to belong, get equipped, and have an active life of service.”

Mount Meru University (MMU) was founded in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1962 as the International Baptist Theological Seminary of Eastern Africa and gained full university status from the government of Tanzania in October 2003. Owned by the Baptist Churches of East Africa, it comprises two main faculties, Theology and Education & Business Studies. Since 2009, the school has also offered a Master of Arts degree in Community Development.

Its president, Harrison Olan’g, immediate past general secretary of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, says his school offers an education that is “life enhancing,” equipping persons with “real knowledge, wisdom, grace and moral uprightness.”

The Free University of the Great Lakes, a private university located in the city of Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and recognized by the Congolese Government, was established by the Baptist Community in Central Africa (CBCA). The CBCA has since invited five other ecclesiastical communities, including the Community of Baptist Churches East of Congo (CEBC), another BWA member body, to be partners in the running of the university.

Its schools include those for Education, Health, and Theology. Since 2008, the university, which has approximately 3,000 students and celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2010, has offered doctoral degrees in Health and Community Development and Theology.

“Twenty five is the age of maturity and responsibility,” said Free University Rector Kambale Karaful Leopold. He noted that though things have not been easy, the school has made progress, acquiring new and expanded facilities; opening new campuses in Butembo and Bukavu in 2001 and 2002 respectively; and establishing relationships and forming partnerships with a number of universities around the world, such as with the University of Geneva in Switzerland and the Protestant University of Utrecht in the Netherlands.

Like Baptists in most parts of the world, African Baptists have taken bold steps to providing education at all levels, as evidenced by the four colleges and universities highlighted here.

Top: The chapel at Bowen University in Nigeria
Above: A graduating class at Bowen University
(Photos courtesy of Bowen University)
Pakistan, the second most populous Muslim-majority country in the world, is not the most hospitable place for Christians. The country was, for many years, one of the main sponsors of a resolution going through the rounds in the United Nations that would, in effect, make blasphemy laws global. The resolution, which eventually stalled in the UN due to increasing opposition, was strongly condemned by the Baptist World Alliance and other Christian organizations.

The BWA in a released statement said that the “Combating Defamation of Religions” resolution “is incompatible with the fundamental freedoms of individuals to freely exercise and peacefully express their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.” The BWA feared that the resolution would “amount to an international blasphemy law, similar to those existing in many Muslim countries.” These laws, the international Baptist organization contends, “are used to silence dissident discourses, to incarcerate political activists and journalists, and thus directly affect the religious freedom rights of non-Muslim minorities in those countries.”

Pakistan has some of the strictest blasphemy laws among countries with a Muslim-majority population. It has been alleged that these blasphemy laws have been used by individuals and groups to settle personal scores or to gain personal, business, property or commercial advantage.

Over the past year, three high profile cases highlighted Pakistan’s lack of religious tolerance. The first was that of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted in November 2010 of blasphemy by a Pakistan Court and sentenced to death by hanging. Though the penalty has not been carried out, the conviction against Bibi still stands and she remains incarcerated.

In January 2011, Salman Taseer, the governor of Pakistan’s Punjab province, died after he was shot by one of his bodyguards.

Sonia’s mother is serving life imprisonment in Punjab under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. It is internationally known that blasphemy laws are controversial in Pakistan because they are abused.

National and international human rights organizations, civil societies and peacemakers are concerned about religious persecution due to blasphemy laws. Various governments, political and religious leaders are urging the Pakistani government to repeal the blasphemy laws to save innocent peoples’ lives.

Many blasphemy cases remain hidden.

Sonia was just 15 years old when her parents were arrested for blasphemy. She was at home when an angry mob of Muslims, including clerics armed with guns, sticks and axes, attacked Sonia’s parents, whom they tortured and handed over to the police to be charged with blasphemy.

“It was terrible and unexpected. I could not believe that someone can be so harsh and merciless. They beat my father and my mother ruthlessly in front of my eyes… I cannot forget that moment,” Sonia said.

Sonia’s father, Munir Masih, and her mother, Ruqiya Bibi, were accused of desecrating Muslims’ Holy Book, the Quran. They were both charged and were arrested under blasphemy laws on December 8, 2008, and faced trial in the Court of Sessions.

On March 2, 2010, the law court sentenced both Ruqiya and Munir to 25 years in prison. Sonia’s father was released on bail on December 9, 2010, while Ruqiya is still in prison.

Sonia’s grandmother took Munir and Ruqiya’s six children, including Sonia, to another place to save their lives as the
for his opposition to the country’s blasphemy laws, and for his supposed support of Bibi.

On March 2, 2011, Shahbaz Bhatti, the government minister for religious minorities, and an advocate for reform of the blasphemy laws, was murdered by three men in Islamabad. Bhatti was the only Christian in Pakistan’s cabinet.

Nongovernmental organizations in Pakistan report that since 1986, when blasphemy laws were first introduced in Pakistan by then President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, more than 1,060 people—at least 456 Ahmadis, 449 Muslims, 134 Christians and 21 Hindus—have been accused of breaking these laws.

**Christian Witness Continues**

Despite these risks, Christians, including Baptists, are taking a firm stand by worshipping, organizing, and helping to meet humanitarian needs. Baptists in Pakistan are attempting to gain possession of a church built in 1899 for Christian railway workers that has been used since 1947 as a community hall for Muslims. Beginning in 2001, Baptists have been negotiating for the return of the church for Christian use. Pakistan’s railway company decided in October 2011 to lease the property to the Baptists, but the Baptists are having difficulty coming up with funds for the lease.

The Pakistan Baptist Convention (PBC), the group negotiating with the railway company for the church building, met on November 29 and elected its board of officers, including the positions of president, vice president, general secretary and legal officer. “We are called to follow the Good Shepherd,” and are urged “to care and pastor others with excellence and fortitude,” a report from the meeting reads.

Efforts at registering the convention have met roadblocks. The legal advocate told “board members that he is facing problems to get registration as a church because the Pakistani government is not [accepting] new applications for church registration.”

(Continued on next page)

situation was tense. The Muslim mob attack left deep scars of insecurity in the minds of Sonia and the other children. “It was so painful to leave the house. I spent my childhood there, with so many memories, but we had to leave.”

After her mother’s arrest, the big responsibility of three younger brothers and two sisters fell on Sonia’s shoulders. She took care of her younger siblings like a mother. The tragedy made her strong even at such a young age.

“I have not seen my mother for the past one and a half years. I miss my mother a lot. She is not just my mother but also my friend. I shared all my worries with her but now I am alone and no one can take me in their lap as my mother did. It was so beautiful. I forget all my worries in my mother’s lap.”

**Sonja Gets Married**

Sonja’s father was very much concerned about his children. As Sonja was the eldest, he decided she should get married. Sonja did not find this acceptable but she obeyed her father. Her father found her match in Lahore. She did not know her bridegroom and did not even see him before the wedding.

Sonja’s dreams remain dry and her hopes remain unfulfilled. Sonja went into marriage without enjoying her childhood and teenage years.

I attended her wedding ceremony on May 8, 2011. I helped her shop for her wedding. Marriage was a bittersweet event for Sonja because her mother was not with her; she was missing her mother a lot.

When I asked her why she did not reject her father’s plans for her to get married, her reply suggested that Sonja, being a respectable girl, decided to sacrifice herself for her father.

“Once I thought of refusing because of my mother’s imprisonment, but I know my father is already in pain. He suffered a lot and he is still suffering and I don’t want to disappoint him. I believe he wants the best for me and I really respect his decision for me.”

She further stated, “I am intensely concerned about my mother’s life, especially when I hear how increasingly dangerous it is for those who are accused of blasphemy.”

She has plans to visit her mother in prison with her husband. She does not want to conceal her marriage from her mother any more.

*Samuel Ahsan is executive director of Save & Serve For Christ Ministries in Lahore, Pakistan*
A Christian Witness

legal advocate was nonetheless urged “to get registration as soon as possible because lots of matters are pending due to [the lack of] registration.”

The PBC is continuing its ministry endeavors despite not being registered. During the Christmas season, a special program was held to which 20 different Sunday schools were invited, every child received a gift, and Christmas dinner was served.

The BWA has, for a long time, been engaging Pakistan even though there are no BWA member bodies in the South Asian nation. Between 2005 and 2007, Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the BWA, spent more than US$450,000 on earthquake relief, reconstruction and housing in Pakistan after a devastating earthquake in October 2005 affected several districts and provinces.

In August 2010, other funds were sent for relief work in Pakistan after heavy monsoon rains swelled the Indus River, causing widespread flooding that covered approximately one-fifth of Pakistan’s total land area.

In 2011, after similar floods devastated the southern province of Sindh, where 22 out of 23 districts in the province were inundated, BWAid sent emergency relief funds directly to Save & Serve For Christ Ministries, a group affiliated with the PBC and based in Lahore. The 2011 floods caused approximately 200 deaths and had an impact on close to 5.3 million people. More than 222,000 individuals were displaced in 2,243 camps in the province, primarily in government schools, other buildings and makeshift-tented settlements.

Samuel Ahsan, executive director of Save & Serve For Christ Ministries, reported that the funds were used to distribute aid to approximately 600 families in the organization’s “Food for All” program. One recipient of relief aid said, “God … brought you as angels to help us with food. I have great respect for Christians and churches now. You are great people. I have never seen such kind-hearted people like you. Even when our own community left us alone in this situation, you provide us food.”

A village elder stated, “Nobody else reached us in the last six weeks. It is your team that has been taking care of our whole village. You are really a man of God.”

A Christian witness in Pakistan remains, despite attempts to see that it be otherwise.
Earthquake relief, reconstruction and housing

A village elder stated, “Nobody else reached us in the last six weeks. It is your team that has been taking care of our whole village. You are really a man of God.”

“God . . . brought you as angels to help us with food. I have great respect for Christians and churches now.”
Dear Friends,

Early on Wednesday morning, October 19, I left Amman [in Jordan] for Gaza via Egypt, arriving late that evening.

You cannot imagine the relentless stress suffered by church leaders in a small, crowded area like Gaza (140 square miles). They are isolated from the rest of the world, surrounded by 1.7 million [people], ruled by Hamas, and oppressed by the extremists and the even more radical Salafists. Every day, they battle depression and hopelessness. My first visit on Thursday was with a couple, students of mine at Bethlehem Bible College, who lead a home Bible study. For hours, we talked about the unique ministry challenges they face and sought God together to find ways to serve better and to reach out to the territory’s tiny Christian community.

I counseled another leader who has been stumbling and became isolated from the ministry. By God’s grace, he and his wife are once again leading worship in a home Bible study. On another occasion, I spent a very productive time supporting and encouraging a couple who leads worship in a church.

There is much sickness in Gaza, a lot of it caused by the stress of daily life in addition to the diseases and infirmities that we all face. I visited a family who just lost their father to cancer. He was only 52 years old and had been a classmate of mine growing up in Gaza. I shared some memories with them about their dear father; we read the Scriptures together and thanked God for His comfort.

In another home, I ministered to a mother who is struggling to overcome pancreatic cancer. And at the hospital, I praised God for saving a man who had a brain clot. He is a physician and a member of Gaza Baptist Church.

But the number one disease in the Gaza Strip is worry. So this was my main topic when I shared in home Bible studies and when I spoke to the teachers at the Lighthouse School and with other church leaders, besides preaching and teaching in the church on two Sundays.

One day I walked into a pharmacy and my heart nearly broke as the owner, who is a good friend, broke down crying uncontrollably the moment she saw me. She could not believe that I was actually there. She was able to share the oppression and pain she is suffering and later told me how the Lord used my visit to comfort and strengthen her.

Poverty is great in Gaza and unemployment is still very high. But thanks to God’s grace and the generosity of friends like you, I was able to help 27 families – Christian and non-Christian – with food and medicine. Most of these families live in the Deir El Balah refugee camp (nearly 20,000 people packed into 39 acres). Each package included olive oil, corn oil, different kinds of beans, rice, sugar, and other supplies, worth about US$60 (we bought the food in Gaza).

God willing, my next visit will be in January. At that time, I hope also to teach a course on the Gospel of John through the Gaza extension of the Bethlehem Bible College.

Please pray for:

- The people I visited, that the Lord will continue to heal, encourage, and comfort
- Those who helped with relief work, that God would multiply the “loaves and fishes”
- My sister, who had blood clot in her leg and continues to need costly medical attention at home
- A desperately-needed second car
- My upcoming January visit

Thank you very much for your prayers and partnership and for standing with us in these increasingly difficult days.

Gratefully,

Hanna, Suhad, Joyce & Jolene

November 9, 2011

Hanna Massad is pastor of the Gaza Baptist Church in Palestine who, because of violence and threats, lives much of the time in Amman, Jordan.
The Baptist Women’s Union of Latin America (UFBAL) held a Leadership Conference from September 15-18, 2011, in Panama City, Panama. There were 200 women in attendance from 20 of the 24 national Baptist women’s organizations. The theme was “Hacia un Compromiso con la Niñez en America Latina” (“Towards a commitment with children in Latin America”).

Raquel Contreras, president of the BWA Women’s Department, opened and closed the conference with inspiring messages that focused on the theme. Her first message opened the hearts of the women to what God was going to do through the conference, and the closing message presented a challenge to all to go and share what had been learned in order to impact Latin America, and especially children, for Christ.

Alicia de Zorzoli, past secretary/treasurer of the BWA Women’s Department, led two Bible studies based on the theme. She encouraged the women gathered to take into account the attitude of Jesus towards the children in all of their plans and ministry projects. She also expressed that everyone needs to use the wisdom of God, the power of the Holy Spirit and the sacrificial love of Christ in caring for all the children in Latin America.

(Continued on next page)
There was an air of excitement as the Asian Baptist Women’s Union (ABWU) officers came together in Bali, Indonesia, for the Asian Baptist Young Women’s Leadership Conference. A lot of prayers and hard work had gone into the preparation, and now their vision was becoming a reality. The officers’ desire was to see more committed young women for Christ, full of love, compassion, and enthusiasm.

There were 546 participants from 16 countries that came together from October 26-29, 2011, for the ABWU Young Women’s Leadership Conference at the Sanur Paradise Plaza Hotel in Bali, Indonesia. “Transform a Life, Transform Asia” was the theme of the conference based on Romans 12:1-2.

The following four objectives were achieved through the creative and informative program: train and challenge emerging young Asian women leaders to serve God through the ABWU; provide the young women a venue to worship and fellowship with women from other Asian countries; encourage the young women to be faithful in their local churches and unions; and strengthen the young women’s sense of unity and responsibility to pray and encourage each other.

Everyone came to the opening ceremony in their national dress.

Kimberly Overton, a young professional woman, was the keynote speaker who brought the opening message. Based on Romans 12:1-2 she asked the question, “What does it really mean to be transformed?” She said that Paul makes a plea that we transform our minds, hearts, and lives.

Paul makes it sound so enticing, so easy, and yet practically transformation requires proper motivation and discipline. She shared some of her experiences of how God has worked in her life to transform her in order to serve the Lord where she lives and works. She challenged everyone present to open their hearts, minds, and lives to be transformed in order to impact their world for Christ.

The Bible studies for the next two days were led by Miyon Chung, who is an associate professor of theology at Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology in Seoul, Korea. The first study emphasized the priestly way of life, and how to live as a living sacrifice unto God for the world. The second study focused on Biblical styles of leadership for Asian women today. She discussed the difference between a Biblical style of leadership and secular style of leadership.

Immediately after the Bible studies, young women shared what God is doing in their lives. On the first day Asha Sanchu from Nagaland in India shared how she realized her call to work...
with women who find themselves in prostitution and human trafficking. She shared some of her experiences in working with women in these situations and in helping them to transform their lives. The second day Louis Irfan from Pakistan shared how God is using her transformed life to touch the lives of women and children in her country. She is a teacher in the Army Public School & College. As a teacher she has the desire for all children to be educated, and she is using her gifts and talents to make that possible.

Patsy Davis, executive director of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department, shared how the young women were created in the image of God in order to live and grow in relationship with Him and impact their world for Christ through the ABWU and BWA Women’s Department.

Lim Sai Mooi, Religious Education Lecturer and Associate Academic Dean at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, presented on Biblical styles of leadership for women in Asia today. Victor Rembeth, ordained Baptist minister, with experiences in empowering people on issues related to humanity and spirituality, shared the importance of spiritual growth among young women in the 21st century.

On the second and third day, seven workshops were offered. The workshops included prayer walking, led by Connie Stallings, in which participants learned a basic method of prayer walking that can be done at any time and any place, and also had an opportunity to participate in a prayer walk in the area around the hotel. Another workshop was peer counseling, led by Mareyke Tairas, which emphasized the need for Christians to equip themselves so as to be ready and available to respond when the call for this type of service and ministry is needed. Ai Nohara led a workshop on how to get involved in mission, in which participants learned the importance of mission work in the Christian life in order to transform lives and Asia.

Other workshops were on how to reach out to business women, led by Latika Paul; developing intimacy with God, led by Bong Derramas.; beauty from the inside out, led by Laura Raymundo; and involvement in women’s local organizations by young women, led by Atola Subong.

On Thursday evening John Kok, BWA and Asia Pacific Baptist Federation vice president, brought the evening’s message. In a humorous and creative way, Kok used some of the unique characteristics of women to bring home the importance of women being called of God to impact their world.

“Amazing Asia” was an activity that allowed all participants to learn more about the 16 countries represented and their ministries. In Amazing Asia the women walked from table to table learning about the different countries and their food, crafts, clothing, customs, music, and ministries.

Saturday was a time of celebration and dedication. Kimberly Overton, keynote speaker, challenged each one in attendance to be daring and try something new and innovative in order to transform where they live, which will lead to transforming Asia and then the world.

The lives of women

Marlene Baltazar, president of the Baptist Women’s Union of Latin America

and who do not know the Lord as Savior. Then, rescue them for Christ, beginning with their family, neighbors, friends and church, reaching out to the streets or whatever other place possible. At the close of the conference she challenged everyone to be faithful with their commitment to children in Latin America.

Alicia de Zorzoli, past secretary/treasurer of the BWA Women’s Department, leading a Bible Study at the leadership conference

wisdom of God, the power of the Holy the sacrificial love of Christ in caring all the children in Latin America.”
In Memoriam

Alexander Vervay,

former president of the Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptist Churches of Tajikistan, died on November 20, from a heart attack. He was 57 years old.

Vervay was pastor of the “mother” Baptist church in Dushanbe, the capital and largest city of Tajikistan. He served as president of the union for more than 15 years. The union is affiliated with the European Baptist Federation (EBF), one of six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance.

Under his leadership, the Baptist union doubled the number of churches in the country and expanded children’s, prison, and other types of ministries.

Vervay led the union through difficult periods as Tajikistan went through five years of civil war between 1992 and 1997 after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Tajikistan is a former republic of the Soviet Union and is 98 percent Muslim.

Religious freedom in the Central Asian country has eroded in recent years. By law, religious communities must be registered by the State Committee on Religious Affairs and with local authorities. This has posed special challenges for the Baptist union and its churches. Religious groups that do not have a physical structure are not allowed to gather publicly for prayer. Failure to register can result in large fines and the closure of a place of worship.

Most Tajik Baptists are German and Russian, and many fled from the country during the civil war. Vervay is of Russian and German descent and roughly half his congregation in Dushanbe are German. “He was one of those ‘left behind’ when so many Russian-German Baptists emigrated from Tajikistan in the early 1990s,” said EBF General Secretary Tony Peck. “He went on to give wise and visionary leadership to the Dushanbe church and the union.”

Funeral services were on November 25.

Vervay leaves wife, Lyudmila Werway; sons, Veniamin, Dmitriy, and Yurii; and daughters, Yulya, Olga, and Anya.

Joshua Thompson,

a past president and general secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland (BUI), renamed the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland in 1999, has died. He was 87 years old.

Thompson was the longest serving general secretary in the history of Irish Baptists, becoming general secretary at age 28 in 1952 and serving until his retirement in 1978. He later served as president of the Baptist union from 1992-1993.

Under his leadership, the Irish Baptist College was transferred to the union in 1963 and was relocated from Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland, to Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland. Thompson was instrumental in the appointment of new leadership at the college and the increased student enrollment. He served the college as secretary and was a lecturer in Baptist Principles.

In 1968, Thompson co-founded the Irish Baptist Historical Society in association with Harry Gribbon. He acted for a period as secretary of the Historical Society and was its journal editor until 2002.

Thompson authored *Century of Grace: The Baptist Union of Ireland: A Short History 1895-1995*. The book was published to mark the 100th anniversary of the union and has become the definitive history of Baptists in Ireland.

Thompson chaired the Re-organization Committee of the union that brought to fruition major changes that led to the restructuring of the association.

The Irish Baptist leader served as Baptist chaplain at Queens University Belfast and earned a doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Oxford. After retiring as BUI general secretary, he became pastor of Windsor Baptist Church in the university area of Belfast. Due to deteriorating health, he retired from all activities in 2002.

He leaves wife, Joan, and daughters, Jocelyn and Lindsey.

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**BOOK NOTES**

Books Received by the BWA


In his usual lucid style, Harmon offers an accessible book full of informed, wise and helpful insights for anyone who cares about our Lord’s prayer for the unity of the church. This is a book every Christian ought to read.


This book contains useful information on the ethno-history of the Indian Christian movement in South Africa. It provides details on the birth, growth, challenges and achievements of South African Indian Christians of Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Adventist, Pentecostal, and other churches. Starting with the arrival of the first Indians as indentured workers in Natal, the compiler assembles data covering a period of 150 years.


This one-volume publication in English and French includes a preface by then BWA Women’s Department President, Dorothy Selebano, and Acknowledgments by Tunrayo Adegbilero, the president of the Baptist Women’s Union of Africa. The book is compiled by Ethel Codrington, Julie Esisi, and Adenike Olasina.
It all started innocently enough. I joined the president of Baptists in the Bahamas, Anthony Carroll, the president of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, William Thompson, and about 12 other Baptist leaders to be received by His Excellency Governor General of the Bahamas, Sir Arthur Foulkes. We met at the Governor’s House, a beautiful Bahamian house built in 1801. The graceful columns and broad, circular drive recall the styles of parts of the world with which I am familiar—but the pink color, distinctive cross-laid cornerstones, and louvered wooden shutters are definitely Bahamian. The house offers an impressive welcome by uniformed naval officers of the Royal Bahamas Defense Force.

What started as a casual welcome and courtesy visit soon became a spiritual lesson for me. The visit moved from being innocent to being insightful and intense. As I heard Sir Foulkes’ story and heard the response of the Bahamian Baptists, I knew I was in the presence of a great man and a national hero.

I learned that Sir Foulkes was one of the “Eight.” He was one of the primary leaders that led the independence movement in the Bahamas taking on the established wealth and power of the time called the “Bay Street Gang.” A Baptist, Dr. Brown, was also one of the “Eight.” Sir Foulkes was a newspaper reporter who had the courage to challenge the financial and racial inequities of his day. He paid a dear price for his writings and convictions in loss of jobs, threats to his family, public shunning, and every other discriminatory horror you can name. As he shared his story the heartbeat of the room quickened.

As the visit with the Baptists in the Bahamas continued I began to hear more and more of those stories. They brought back memories of similar stories I heard while in South Africa last October. The question that struck me is, how do people like Sir Foulkes, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and so many others I could name in other areas of the world, provide the leadership they do? How do they speak with a confidence that speaks truth without having to compromise that truth by retaliating with violence or hatred?

There is always both calm and power in their quiet manner and presence. Sir Foulkes, as well as all the others, reference faith as the center of all that they endured. Each leader speaks of God being their refuge. You find this often in scripture but I had never really thought through its meaning. The theme of God as refuge is in so many of our old hymns: “A Mighty Fortress is our God,” “O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home.” There is a sense we all know what it means for God to be our refuge, our fortress, our shelter and shield, our hiding place.

Our images of God are most often images of “person.” If God were a person what kind of person would God be? Would God be father, mother, sovereign, helper, or guide? But, the question also needs to be asked, if God were a place what kind of place would God be? God would be a safe place, a shelter that is strong, a restorative place.

It is little wonder so many of us burn out as we do and live such spiritually exhausted, depleted lives. There is refuge we could take but we just keep running. Sometimes we run to the wrong kind of shelter, a shelter where the refuge is really a shallow entertaining of ourselves. We take refuge in manic, frantic work. We take refuge in fantasizing the world into what we hope it will be, creating an almost different world than the real one in which we live.

That is not refuge. That is escape—and there is a difference between the two. Escape isn’t solid. It doesn’t hold anything. It distracts from life. It doesn’t build one up. Escape is a form of absence.

Refuge is room for presence. It requires stillness, quiet, calm, a healing place, a fortress. And that place is never out there. It happens here, within us. We breathe in the refuge of God. We open ourselves to a sheltering presence and it remains with us into whatever storm we have to go.

I say it remains within us, but we must also see to it that it remains among us. The church is a place of refuge. The church is a safe place for anyone to be exactly who they are, to say what they need to say, and find themselves accepted. When the church does this well, we have transformed communities and even parts of the world.

God is our refuge. God is a safe place, a welcoming, protecting, deeply strengthening refuge. Let us live in such a place and let such a place shape how we live toward others. “For God is our fortress and we shall not be shaken (Psalm 62:2).”
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