Baptist World

A Magazine of the Baptist World Alliance

Your Network to the World!

Baptists Minister in Conflict Zones

January/March 2013
Volume 60, Number 1
Baptist World
January/March 2013          Volume 60, Number 1

BAPTIST WORLD MAgAzIne

5 BWA News Highlights
6 Bible Translation
7 The New Testament in Jamaican Creole
8 European Baptists Plan Bible Translation Seminar
9 Vatican: A New Evangelization
10 Conflicts Around the World
11 The BWA and the Review of Pakistan
12 Pakistan under the Microscope
13 Baptists Help Syrians Displaced by Civil War
14 Syrian Face Dire Future
15 Baptists in Gaza: A Wedding & A Funeral
16 Lebanese Baptists Call for Prayer, Express Anger at Bomb Attack
17 India: Thousands of Indigenous Assamese Displaced after Violence
18 Democratic Republic of the Congo: Four Thousand Baptist Families Displaced in Goma
19 Baptist Pastors Killed in Nigerian Bomb Attacks

COVER PHOTO
Baptists joining a rally for peace in Lahore, Pakistan, in September 2012

photos courtesy of Save & Serve For Christ Ministries Pakistan

Unless otherwise noted, photos in the issue are by BWA staff.

Baptist World Editor: Eron Henry, E-mail: ehenry@bwanet.org
Copy Editor: Lauren Weaver
Published quarterly by the Baptist World Alliance, 405 North Washington Street, Falls Church, Virginia 22046 USA. Telephone: +1-703-790-8980; Fax: +1-703-893-5160; E-mail: BWA@bwanet.org; Website: www.bwanet.org. Preferred Periodicals postage paid at McLean, VA 22101, and additional entry points.

The Baptist World Alliance is a fellowship of 223 Baptist conventions and unions comprising a membership of more than 42 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.

For information on bulk orders, write to the Communications Division, Baptist World Alliance, 405 North Washington Street, Falls Church, Virginia 22046 USA. Previous volumes of Baptist World are available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA.

POSTMASTER: Send change of address to BAPTIST WORLD, 405 North Washington Street, Falls Church, Virginia 22046 USA. Please give both old and new addresses and attach a mailing label from an old issue. USA: Please provide nine-digit code (ZIP + 4).

PRINTED IN U.S.A.
ISSN 005-5808
21 Natural Disasters
21 Caribbean Suffers Destruction in the Wake of Hurricane Sandy
22 Hurricane Sandy: Baptists in US Coordinate Response
23 Baptists Flooded in Croatian Village

24 Asia Pacific
24 Expressions of Cultural Diversity at Asia Pacific Conference

25 Australia
25 Australian Baptists & Uniting Church Hold Theological Dialogue

26 United States
26 Recent Trends in American Christianity

27 Book Notes
27 William Tuck, Modern Shapers of Baptist Thought in America, Richmond, Virginia Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies, 2012

28 Baptist Women
28 North American Baptist Women Meet
29 Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer

30 In Memoriam
Those who translate the Bible into a people’s heart language signal how much they value culture as a fitting context for the proclamation of the Gospel. They communicate the Christian faith in terms that reflect high regard for the integrity of people’s identity and, in the process, they make a major contribution to destigmatizing people’s culture.

In his celebrated work, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Lamin Sanneh discusses translation in terms that go “beyond the narrow, technical bounds of textual work.” Sanneh’s analysis shows the importance of efforts to render the biblical text in a people’s heart language. According to Sanneh, “Vernacular translation begins with the effort to equip the gospel with terms of familiarity... [I]n endeavoring to accomplish this vernacular task, translation may make commonplace passages of Scripture come alive, while also stimulating indigenous religious and cultural renewal.” Confidence in the value of the vernacular “has encouraged the role of recipient cultures as decisive for the final appropriation of the message.”

A case in point is the production of *Di Jamiekan Nyuu Testament*, a project undertaken by the Bible Society of the West Indies under the leadership of Courtney Stewart. Hopefully, this project represents the approaching final stage in the liberation of the Jamaican people from the confinement imposed on them by Christian mission as a surrogate for Western colonialism. The translators of this *Nyuu Testament* have succeeded in relativizing the status of English as the language that bears the message of the Gospel in the Jamaican context. By so doing, the translators have affirmed the people’s capacity for critical reflection in their own terms. At the same time, they are illustrating the power of the Gospel when it is dressed in the clothes of the people receiving it and communicated in terms that ring true in their hearts.

Over the years, many people have played a vital role in making the Scriptures available to people across the world in their own languages. We remember the work of persons like Venerable Bede and John Wycliffe and the Lollards; William Tyndale whose legacy, in the words of Bishop Westcott, lies in his decision that the “Bible should be popular and not literary, speaking in a simple dialect.” J. R. Green, writing in 1882, pointed to the effect of Bible translation on literature among Britons. Meanwhile, among the German-speaking people, Martin Luther’s 1534 translation of the Bible has had a decisive effect on the development of the German language.

It is not insignificant that Baptists have been among the many Christians who have reflected appropriate respect for people’s cultures and have labored to secure the Bible in the languages we use. We remember the seminal linguistic work undertaken, for example, by William Carey in India, the Judsons in Myanmar, and Thomas Jefferson Bowen, whose work in Nigeria laid the foundations not only for the Yoruba language that is widely spoken today in Nigeria, Benin and Togo, but also for the Bible in Yoruba.

Among the many other Baptists whose work in Bible translation we celebrate are Lien-Hwa Chow, translator and co-chief editor of the *Revised Chinese Union Version* and of *Today’s Chinese Version*. We also celebrate Lien-Hwa Chow’s contribution as chair of the translation team for the *Chinese Interconfessional Bible*, produced jointly by Roman Catholics and Protestants.

We remember the vital role played by Masahiro Kanoy in the translation of the Bible into Japanese and especially his work on the editorial team for the *New Common Bible* translation. We also recall Hrahsel Sawiliaua Luaia’s 20 years of labor to produce the Bible in Mizo - the language of the Mizo people whose largest populations are in India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Tony Cupit and Mapusiya Kolo were among those who translated the New Testament and sections of the Old Testament into Kyaka Enga, one of the languages of Papua New Guinea, and Les Haydon and George Stubbs from Australia helped render the Bible in the language of the Lenje people of Zambia.

The National Baptist Convention of Brazil has provided the Bible in the languages of the Tucano and the Aparai people of the Amazon. Meanwhile, the National Baptist Convention of Chile has sponsored Bible translation into the language of the indigenous Mapuches of south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina.

Of course, we know that these and many other Baptists have played only a small part in what is a major undertaking carried out by the entire Christian community, sometimes working most effectively through interchurch partnership. The work of these translators is vital because, as a controversial Methodist missionary/anthropologist once said, however fluent people may speak a foreign language, “its words can never feel to them as their native words. To express the dear and intimate things which are the very breath and substance of life, a [person] will fall back on the tongue he learnt not at school, but in the house... He may bargain in the other, or pass examinations in it, but... if you wish to reach his heart you will address him in [his heart] language.” We owe a debt of gratitude to all who labor in the ministry of Bible translation.

Today, as Bible translation work continues, should we not celebrate and support the work being done by the Wycliffe Bible translators, the Faith Comes by Hearing Project, and especially the Bible Societies whose understanding of the significance of Bible translation for the process of world evangelization is so laudable?
Groups Visit BWA Offices

The Baptist World Alliance® hosted three groups at its international offices in the Washington, DC, suburb of Falls Church in September.

Sixty two members of the 100-voice Brazilian Memorial Baptist Choir from the capital city of Brasilia came to the BWA offices on September 12. They sang for the BWA staff and were briefed by staff members about the ministries of the BWA. The choir was on a singing tour to a number of Baptist churches in the Washington Metropolitan Area.

BWA staff received members of the Shiloh Baptist Association in the state of Virginia in the United States on September 17. The association includes churches in Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock counties, mainly in central Virginia.

The group, which comprised ordained clergy and lay persons, was on a familiarization tour of several Baptist entities located within the Washington Metropolitan Area, including the BWA. Senior staff members of the BWA made brief presentations on BWA ministries and responded to questions.

Sixteen Baptist leaders from Washington, DC, Southern Maryland and Northern Virginia spent the morning of September 27 considering the local church’s role in development and aid. Rothangliani Chhangte, who took up the post of director of Baptist World Aid on August 1, gave examples of how the BWA is helping to resource programs to reduce poverty, disease, and suffering around the world.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam also briefed the group on his upcoming meetings with Baptists in Australia and Papua New Guinea.

The gathering was the latest in a series of “coffee receptions” for Baptist pastors hosted by Callam. The receptions are aimed at encouraging fellowship and cooperation with key Baptist congregations and groups in close proximity to the BWA offices, and to communicate directly with local congregations and institutions on the work of the BWA. Previous meetings have included discussions on church and media, freedom and justice advocacy for Baptists, and other topics of interest to local churches.

International Theological Education Conference Planned for Jamaica in June 2013

The 8th Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE) takes place in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, from June 28-30, 2013.

The event will focus on the theme, In Step with the Spirit: Perspectives on Pneumatology within the Worldwide Baptist Family. It will include a wide ranging set of papers and discussions from Baptist leaders, pastors, theologians, and educators from all six regions of the BWA – Africa, Asia Pacific, Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and North America.

Topics to be explored include Baptist Contributions to Theological Reflection on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit and Social Justice, and Emerging Issues in the Theological Formation of Ministerial Students.

BICTE, planned by the Baptist World Alliance® (BWA), is typically held every five years. The 7th BICTE was held in Prague, Czech Republic, in July 2008.

BICTE immediately precedes the BWA Annual Gathering, which will be held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, from July 1-6, 2013.

Information and online registration for BICTE and the Annual Gathering is available on the BWA website, www.bwanet.org.
In the early 1980s the United Bible Societies (UBS) reported an “astonishing” finding. A language survey had revealed that in Jamaica, the largely Patwa-speaking population of two million had no Scriptures in the mother tongue. However the Board of the Bible Society of the West Indies (BSWI) felt that the time was not right for such a translation project. In fact, members of the Board reacted with dismay when one of their colleagues persistently raised the matter of a Patwa Bible. This was not surprising. Traditionally, Patwa has been frowned upon as “bad English.” Until recently, it was deliberately ignored in the education system, and was despised by those who associated the language with intellectual and moral weakness. But God knew better; and He had a plan.

The turning point came in 1985 when the General Secretary of the BSWI, William Edwards, heard from a social worker who was finding it much more effective to communicate with our people in Patwa instead of Standard English. He concluded that the translation project was a necessity in order that the Word of God might be effectively communicated to the Jamaican people.

Eight years later, in January 1993, the project was officially launched, with the late Harold Fehderau as the UBS-assigned translation consultant. Then in 1994, work started on the translation under the supervision of the new General Secretary of the BSWI, Courtney Stewart, who succeeded William Edwards. Two years later an audio cassette of Patwa Scripture readings was released to the public, titled “A who run tings?” – meaning, the sovereignty of God. It provoked a vigorous, sometimes heated debate in the media that lasted for months.

There were several outbreaks of controversy during the 20 years that the project lasted. A major outbreak followed the launch in November 2003 of the CD titled “Di Krismos Stori” – meaning, “The Christmas Story.” It was described by newspaper columnist, Devon Dick, as an “engaging dramatic audio presentation of the birth of Jesus Christ;” and he noted that the audience enjoyed every moment of it. On the other hand, another columnist declared that “Jamaican” is not a language!

Looking back, we recognize that much good resulted from these discussions. First of all –

• They were cathartic, releasing strong emotions relating to historical issues of identity, self-esteem and class consciousness; and exposing the misconceptions and prejudice arising from ignorance of modern findings concerning language learning.

• They were also enlightening and transformative. The public became increasingly aware that our bilingual situation needed specialized attention in order to deal with chronic problems such as illiteracy and the widespread failure to master Standard English.

These issues presented an unexpected challenge for the BSWI. Fortunately we were not alone. Our partners and supporters included church leaders of various denominations, many of whom

An audio cassette of Patwa Scripture readings was released to the public, titled “A who run tings?” — meaning, the sovereignty of God. It provoked a vigorous, sometimes heated debate in the media that lasted for months.
The seminar will explore and facilitate a conversation on the overall picture of Bible translation, particularly in Eastern Europe, and will focus on how churches organize translations, the principles guiding the translation process, and how translations are influenced by language and culture.

Five major papers will be presented on Translation Logistics; Models of Translation and the Target Audience; Recent Research on Bible Translation in Central and Eastern Europe; Folk Translations and Vernacular Readings; and recent Romanian translations with particular reference to cultural, ecclesiastical and doctrinal bias.

The event will involve biblical scholars with linguistic skills and experience in translation work who are either specialists in the original texts and versions or who have an interest in contemporary language. Theological teachers, pastors, and lay persons will also participate in the seminar.

Contributors include Juraj Bandy, a professor from Slovakia and a specialist in Bible translation who was responsible for the recent translation of the Slovak Ecumenical Bible; Emanuel Contac, lecturer at the Theological Pentecostal Institute in Bucharest, whose doctoral studies addressed theological and cultural bias in Romanian translations of the New Testament; Iryna Dubianetskaya, a Greek Catholic biblical scholar and linguist and coordinator of the committee for the first academic translation of the Bible into Belarusian; and Florentina Badalanova Geller, professor at the Freie Universität Berlin who is working on a Folk Bible and vernacular Mariology.

Others include Alec Gilmore, Baptist minister in the United Kingdom and senior research fellow at the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) and author of Dictionary of Bible Origins and Interpretation; Jamie Grant, lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Highland Theological College, University of the Highlands and Islands, UK; Lydie Kucova, a member of the IBTS academic team and lecturer in Biblical Studies; and Silviu Tatu, senior lecturer at the Theological Pentecostal Institute in Bucharest, who is acquainted with the version of the Bible translated by Dumitru Cornilescu, the most popular translation among Protestant denominations in Romania, and other translation issues.

People express delight that they can now understand the meaning of Scripture so clearly. They are more eager than ever to keep on reading the Word . . .

Wycliffe Caribbean has participated in a unique way. The director, John Roomes, and language coordinator, June Simmonds, initiated a Literacy and Scripture reading project island wide, in order to prepare our people to read and study the Word in their mother tongue. The main text used in the various reading groups was “di Luuk Buk,” the book of Luke. The response has been remarkable. Most people express delight that they can now understand the meaning of Scripture so clearly. They are more eager than ever to keep on reading the Word especially as they find the phonetic script of the JNT easier to read than the English text. Some tell of renewed spiritual life and a sense of freedom, release from stress, and healing of family relations. Jamaicans abroad have also responded with delight and enthusiasm.

We thank God for the talented and dedicated translators, past and present, and for the skilled translation coordinator, Bertram Gayle; for the exegetes provided by the United Theological College of the West Indies together with the Jamaica Theological Seminary, and for Gosnel Yorke’s special assistance; for amazingly generous donors – the American Bible Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Seed Company; and also for Courtney Stewart – remarkably gifted for the job of managing this project.

The signs are clear: we look forward to an unprecedented move of God’s Spirit in our land.
FOR THREE WEEKS this past Fall, October 7-28, 2012, some 300 Catholic bishops and cardinals gathered at the Vatican at the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI to consider “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” I was honored to represent the Baptist World Alliance® as one of a dozen or so fraternal delegates at this meeting. Fraternal delegates were asked to address the Synod of Bishops, participate in small working groups, and submit written comments on the issues discussed. I learned much and made many new friends from around the world.

by Timothy George

The Synod of Bishops coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council which was opened by Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962. Vatican II met for three years in four sessions and produced 16 documents that are constitutive for Catholic theology and church life today. It also introduced a process of aggiornamento—an Italian word that means “updating.” The 2012 Synod of Bishops embodied this same spirit as it addressed major questions that concern all Christians: How can the message of Jesus Christ be passed on intact to the rising generation? How can the Gospel best be presented to those who yet have no living relationship with Jesus Christ?

Though these are not new questions, there is an acute need for “new” evangelization because communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ faces new and difficult challenges in today’s world. These include what Pope Benedict has called the “tyranny of relativism” and a growing secularism. The result is a denial of God and the loss of basic decency and respect for life that undercuts both belief in God as well as the dignity and sacredness of human life. The process of globalization has made these trends a reality throughout the world. The prevalence of nominalism is another concern. Many people have some church affiliation but do not know Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. The Synod of Bishops declared that the Christian faith is “not simply teachings, wise sayings, a code of morality, or a tradition.” Rather, it is “a true encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ, the Good News and great gift of God to humanity.”

The Synod described the new evangelization as “a time of awakening, of new encouragement, and new witness that Jesus Christ is the center of our faith and daily life,” and it called “every member of the church to a renewal of faith and an actual effort to share it.” To complement the catechism of the Catholic Church, published 20 years ago, the Synod called for a new compendium, a “Pastoral Plan of Initial Proclamation” that would teach a “living encounter with Jesus Christ,” and give practical guidance on the sharing of one’s faith.

Baptists are known for our own commitment to mission and evangelism. Several bishops said to me, “Now, tell us how the Baptists accomplish this?” I was pleased to describe how Baptists make the Great Commission a defining priority in our church life, how Baptists have followed the words of Jesus to go among all the nations, evangelizing, baptizing, and catechizing—and doing all of this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and how Baptists have proclaimed a holistic Gospel emphasizing nurture and discipleship as well as conversion.

The missionary God who sent the church into the world to evangelize and make disciples also placed before her the imperative for Christian unity. We are not only to proclaim the Good News to all peoples but to do it in a way that visibly reflects the unity and love between the Father and the Son. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” Jesus said. And also, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,” (John 20:21; 13:35). Christian unity is not an end in itself but is always
in the service of evangelization. Where our witness is fractured, our message is unpersuasive, if not inaudible. Baptists and Catholics differ on important ecclesial and theological issues and these must be faced with candor and honesty. We are committed to seeking greater mutual understanding through a process of loving dialogue and respectful listening. One example of this approach is the five-year conversation between the Baptist World Alliance and the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity between 2006 and 2010, resulting in the report, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, to be published in the near future.

Today, as never before, all Christians who take seriously Jesus’s call to evangelize must also stand and work together for the protection and flourishing of universal religious freedom, both for individuals and institutions of faith.

It is good to remember that the Protestant Reformation began with a Catholic monk, Martin Luther, pouring over the text of the Bible in order to find salvation for his soul. The Bible was given a prominent place in the work of the Synod. Lamar Vest of the American Bible Society made a special Bible presentation to Pope Benedict who opened the Synod each day with Scripture reading, prayer, and Bible exposition. I was encouraged to hear of many Bible-based streams of renewal within the Catholic world, including a lay couple who lead the evangelical Alpha course network in France.

In my remarks to the Synod, I pointed out that Baptists have been ardent champions of religious freedom, not only for ourselves, but for all persons everywhere. Today, in many places, religious freedom is under assault in many ways. On two occasions during the Synod we received reports of violence against Christians, a terrorist church bombing in Nigeria, and increasing bloodshed in Syria. In other places religious freedom is undermined in more subtle ways, through government intrusion and discrimination. Our advocacy for religious freedom in civil society is undercut if we do not practice it in our own churches and among our several Christian communities. Today, as never before, all Christians who take seriously Jesus’s call to evangelize must also stand and work together for the protection and flourishing of universal religious freedom, both for individuals and institutions of faith.

In his encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, John Paul II emphasized the memory of the martyrs as a living part of our Christian witness today. One of the highlights of my time at the Synod was a visit to the Basilica of St. Bartholomew, located on an island in the Tiber River. There I was shown a beautiful icon of 20th and 21st century Christian martyrs, from East and West, North and South. Within this global mosaic of Christian martyrs, I was most moved to see the likeness of two Baptist Christians, one a humble believer imprisoned and then killed by the Communists in Romania, the other, a Baptist pastor from my own country, the US, Martin Luther King, Jr. Jesus prayed to the heavenly Father that his disciples would be one so that the world might believe. As of old, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church, so now the blood of today’s martyrs is the seed of the church’s unity.

*Timothy George being greeted by Pope Benedict XVI at the Synod of Bishops in Rome*
Pakistan was reviewed in the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in the 14th session of the UPR between October 22 and November 2, 2012. The UPR is a process that reviews the human rights records of all UN member states.

Pakistan was first reviewed in 2008 and underwent its second review on October 30, 2012. Civil society organizations are allowed to send a report on each country that is being reviewed in an effort to influence both the written reports submitted by the state missions, and also the issues that are orally raised by the state members during the UPR sessions. NGO representatives are allowed to attend those sessions, but cannot speak. The written reports submitted by civil society organizations are circulated to the members of the working group evaluating that given country, and are summarized in a 10-page long document organized by the United Nations Human Rights Council.

According to the Pakistani government and many other country missions, Pakistan has made substantial progress since the last review in 2008. Pakistan has ratified seven out of nine major UN conventions or declarations. New human rights legislation has been added and the development of a democratic society, beginning in 2008, has continued. But still there are a lot of problems. There are discriminatory laws, such as the blasphemy law, and active discrimination continues, including violence and killing on religious grounds. Through contacts with the Pakistani Mission at Geneva, and others, we will follow up and see in what way they intend to implement the recommendations BWA and other organizations have offered.

I met several key officials in Geneva. The first was Erling Hoem, the first secretary at the Norwegian Mission, and Hege Kolhus Hansen, adviser on Pakistan at the Department for Regional Affairs and Development at the Foreign Ministry of Norway. The Norwegian Mission tries to give recommendation during the review on most countries. Hansen asked my advice on how Norway could best support religious freedom in Pakistan. I suggested they continue to support interreligious dialogues and give them financial help to meet.

My second meeting was with Irina Schoulgin Nyoni, minister counselor for Human Rights at the Swedish Mission. I learned from her that the various country missions in Geneva may send in questions that the country under review can chose to respond to during its opening statement. These statements are recorded and documented in the final report of the UPR that will be adopted as a resolution. The country under review decides which recommendations to follow, which to study and which to reject.

The UPR began with an opening statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs for Pakistan, Hina Rabbani Khar.
She defended Pakistan’s historical commitment to human rights, and reminded the Working Group that Pakistan was a founding member of the UN Human Rights Council. Between 2006-2011, she said Pakistan played an active role in the council’s work and in building convergences between the West and the Islamic world on the most contentious and challenging issues in the Human Rights Council.

She asserted that the UPR gave Pakistan an opportunity to bring about positive changes in legislation, policy and practice and said that following the restoration of democracy in 2008, Pakistan has taken a number of steps to restore democratic state institutions. The minister indicated that an independent judiciary and legal community have taken wide ranging steps for upholding the rule of law and ensuring the protection of the constitutional rights of all citizens. Khar claimed that during the last four years, there have been transformational changes in Pakistan’s constitutional and legislative framework. The right to education, information and a fair trial are now recognized as fundamental rights, which cannot be suspended, she said.

A number of the 85 states represented at the UPR gave their response, with several commending progress that has been made, while others shared their concerns. The Vatican welcomed steps taken to promote and protect human rights, but it remained concerned about the cases of Asia Bibi and Rimsha Mashi, accused under the Blasphemy Law.

Switzerland urged that Pakistan ensure that blasphemy laws and their implementation are in line with international law. Austria called for the enactment of legislation to ensure freedom of religion and belief for all religious groups and that Pakistan consider abolishing the blasphemy laws. The Netherlands urged Pakistan to repeal or reform thoroughly the blasphemy laws.

Lebanon encouraged Pakistan to adopt measures to ensure freedom of expression. The United States insisted that Pakistan hold accountable those who commit religiously motivated acts of violence. And Argentina asked that Pakistan adopt the necessary additional measures to combat and prevent discrimination against religious minorities.

The Advisor on National Harmony in Pakistan said that there was a misunderstanding that Pakistan’s blasphemy laws are used to target only minorities. The majority of cases registered under this section have been against Muslims, he told the meeting. He claimed that the government has taken measures to prevent possible misuse or abuse of the blasphemy laws. An independent judiciary, free media and vibrant civil society also provide an effective safeguard against any misuse of the blasphemy laws, he said.

A report by 38 stakeholders, including the BWA, indicates strong reservations. The report noted that Pakistan has done very little to incorporate the Human Rights treaties into its domestic laws. Discriminating provisions against religious minorities and restrictions on freedom of religion and belief are embedded in several laws and in Pakistan’s constitution. Some groups recommend that the blasphemy laws be replaced by a section in the Penal Code that makes advocacy of religious hatred or incitement to discrimination or violence a punishable offense.

The BWA contacted 26 different state governments, including the US, Canada, Norway and Sweden, sharing its report with them, and asking them to raise issues of religious freedom violation during their brief oral statements at Pakistan’s UPR session. The BWA also participated in meetings with other civil society organizations in Geneva and in Washington, DC, to articulate the contributions of the civil society organizations in the process, and also to influence the participation of the states in the review of Pakistan, by pointing out priorities that should not be left out in their oral statements. An attempt was made to meet with the Pakistani state mission. Although that meeting did not take place in time for the UPR, contact was established with the Pakistani ambassador, which will be followed up.

During Pakistan’s UPR in 2012, 17 countries raised concerns related to religious freedom violations in their oral statements. In 2008, religious freedom issues were not highlighted by those countries. This shows that the participation of civil society organizations, including the BWA, through their reports and advocacy initiatives, contributed to those countries paying greater attention to issues of religious freedom violation in the 2012 Pakistan UPR.

Preparatory meetings among civil society organizations, including the BWA, led to a consensus about the many issues of concern. Three were raised as common priorities: discriminatory legislation, especially the effect of anti-blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws; citizenship issues as they relate to Hindu women and the disfranchisement of Ahmadis; and violence against minorities, especially the specific targeting of Shias, Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, and impunity shown by perpetrators of such violence.

In spite of all the bad things that continue to happen to religious minorities in Pakistan, the country has made significant progress since its first UPR in 2008. The fact that it has signed and ratified the ICCPR (International Covenant on Political Rights) is in itself worthy of note, since it commits the country to international treaties that needs to be honored. The BWA will continue to follow up on the 2012 UPR session, until it is reflected in the lives of the Pakistani people, particularly religious minorities, which are among the most vulnerable in that society.

The UPR is a valid mechanism that offers a good platform for human rights advocacy on the part of civil society organizations. The BWA will continue to use the UPR to address situations of concern in other countries. There needs to be more explicit mechanisms of accountability, which follows closely and step-by-step the commitments made by the reviewed country in response to the recommendations received. The absence of such mechanisms makes it more important for civil society organizations like the BWA to continue to monitor the situation on the ground, and to constantly remind each country reviewed in the UPR process of the commitments they have made. The BWA is already preparing reports on other countries that will undergo review in 2013.
The Baptist World Alliance\textsuperscript{®} led a response to assist Syrians displaced by the civil war in the Middle Eastern country. The BWA sent an initial grant of US$15,000 for the relief effort and encouraged Baptists around the world to make donations to the BWA to alleviate what has developed into an urgent need.

Baptists in Syria have appealed for prayer for peace as the civil war drags on, severely affecting the lives of the country’s citizens, including the lives of Baptists and other Christians.

Mouner Ajji, pastor of Aleppo Baptist Church, reported that Baptists in the area of Aleppo known as Midan were among those who were able, for the first time in days, to get out of their houses on Sunday, September 16. Government forces had re-established control over that section of the city that had fallen into the hands of rebels, enabling freer movement.

He reported, “I did not have a chance to visit the area to see the damage but I hope that there is not that much destruction there.” He, however, attempted to go to Jdaide, an old area of the city, but had to abort his tour due to heavy shelling and gunfire.

Ajji expressed concern that schools and universities were unable to reopen for the new school year. “Mid-September is the time that schools and universities start, but it seems that they won’t now, because thousands of refugees are living in schools and in the university campus and fighting is still going [on] in many areas in the city!” He indicated that parents were too afraid to send their children outside due to the fighting.

Aleppo, the largest city in Syria, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It was largely spared during the earlier stages of the Syrian civil war that began in March 2011, but was gradually drawn into the conflict toward the middle of 2012.

The Battle for Aleppo began on July 19 between the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian military. Rebels and government forces fought for control of the city. Hundreds were killed in the violence and many Aleppo neighborhoods were badly damaged. In an attack on September 9, more than 30 civilians and two security force members were killed near the Municipal Stadium as a result of a car bomb blast.

A number of churches were badly damaged or destroyed. The Presbyterian church in Aleppo was bombed and destroyed, in addition to St. Gregorios Church for the Armenian Orthodox and the St. Vartan Church and monastery for the Jesuits. The Baptist church in Aleppo had near misses with two mortars destroying a building next to the Baptist church building.

In Homs, a city that has seen some of the fiercest battles, the al-Zinnar Syriac Orthodox, St. Georges Greek Orthodox, and Holy Spirit Syriac Catholic churches were destroyed, as well as St. Ilian Jesuit Monastery. The Lady of Peace Malekit Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Church of al-Arba’ain Greek Orthodox, St. Maron Church for Maronite, and St. Is-Haqian Church for the Armenian Orthodox were badly damaged, as was the Savior Monastery for Catholics. Many of these were historic structures hundreds of years old.

Ajji reported on November 24 that things had improved in
A three-wall refugee shelter with sheets for the fourth wall

Aleppo. However, mortar shells were still causing loss of life and destruction of property. The presence of snipers led to the closure of streets and businesses as neighborhoods became dangerous to travel and to do business. He himself was turned back as he tried to travel in the vicinities of Sara and Sami close to downtown Aleppo. Kidnappings are also on the rise. In November, two church workers were kidnapped and were released only after ransoms were paid.

It is also becoming more expensive to live in Aleppo, even as people lose their livelihoods. “Prices are going up in a crazy way,” Ajii said, a problem made more difficult by the approaching winter. According to the UN, more than 200,000 people have fled Aleppo, once home to more than two million people, and regarded as Syria’s commercial hub.

Since the outbreak of violence in Syria in March 2011, the humanitarian situation has continuously deteriorated. Estimates of deaths in the conflict vary, with figures ranging from 40,000 to 52,545. Hundreds of thousands have fled their homes, with many seeking safety in nearby countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported at the end of October that the number of Syrian refugees had increased to between 355,000 and 500,000. Millions more are internally displaced.

A major problem is access to food. The longer term forecast for food availability and affordability in Syria looks bleak with the economy continuing to unravel. Those immediately affected by the violence in the hot-spots have lost access to the most basic items and are desperately in need of food supplies.

The Baptist Convention of Syria, a BWA member organization, has approximately 600 members in 10 churches.

The Baptist Convention of Syria, a BWA member organization, has approximately 600 members in 10 churches.

A three-wall refugee shelter with sheets for the fourth wall

The conflict in Syria has raged continuously since March 2011 and is now described by the United Nations as a civil war. The impact on the civilian population has been devastating, overwhelming humanitarian actors within Syria itself and also in neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, all of which host increasingly high numbers of refugees.

From a humanitarian standpoint, the Syrian crisis has led to enormous human suffering as populations have been displaced within the country by violence (some several times), others have fled across borders seeking refuge, and issues of access to food, shelter, schools, medical care and other services continue to escalate and negatively impact families and individuals.

Funding for the crisis is falling short, reaching only 45 percent of what is needed inside Syria and 35 percent of resources to meet the basic needs of refugees in neighboring countries. This situation is considered “catastrophic” by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA).

Unfortunately the forecast is for a long and protracted crisis; at present there is no end in sight to the immensely complex conflict, nor to the escalating humanitarian needs of the Syrian families — women, men, and children — who are caught in the struggle and suffer its consequences.

In response to the escalating humanitarian needs stemming from the crisis, LSESD is leading a multi-church initiative through partners within Syria, Lebanon and Jordan to assist families and individuals that are negatively impacted by the Syrian conflict.

The humanitarian response includes food distribution, medical care and psychological counseling, rent assistance, and distribution of non-food items including hygiene kits, bedding, and winterization items. As the crisis has evolved, so has LSESD’s response to needs.

Beneficiaries include Christians and those from other faith backgrounds, and comprise refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, and internally displaced persons within Syria, as well as those still in their homes who are most vulnerable. LSESD’s efforts to build the capacities of the local partners are an integral part of this project, enabling them to effectively serve their communities.

In Syria

The situation grows more worrying and complex as humanitarian needs increase in Syria. Fighting and the cumulative effects of the crisis continue to affect more than 2.5 million people inside the country. The violence has led to the loss of lives of thousands of men, women and children. Countless homes,
clinics, hospitals, schools and other essential services and infrastructure such as water and sanitation networks have been destroyed or severely damaged. Large-scale displacement is resulting in over-crowded shelters. Host communities’ capacity to support is overstretched. Violence makes it difficult for people to have access to safe water, food, and health care. Livelihoods are compromised or destroyed, leading many to flee for economic as well as safety reasons. Violence, insecurity and displacement are negatively impacting people’s physical and psychological well-being, and they have limited or no access to basic social services.

An estimated 1.2 million to 2.5 million people are internally displaced by the violence, taking shelter in public buildings, parks, and with host families. Some have been displaced two or more times. Due to growing population displacement, the need for shelter and non-food items throughout Syria continues to rise. Many of the country's internally displaced persons are currently housed in nearly 2,000 schools and other public buildings, which lack adequate heating and sanitation facilities. Low temperatures with the onset of winter are creating additional burdens, as shelters are not adequately insulated from the cold.

UN-OCHA reports that three million Syrians are at imminent risk of food insecurity, including 1.5 million who need food assistance over the next three to six months. In areas where fighting is taking place, food prices are reported to have almost doubled since before the conflict. The prices of some staple foods are on the rise. Wheat prices have increased 11 percent due to disruptions in local supply chains. This is expected to worsen as the conflict continues. Cooking fuel is also in short supply, selling on the black market at a 400 percent mark-up. The government is reported to have reserves to import the necessary food and non-food commodities, however at a high cost. As people struggle to make ends meet, the World Food Program warns that households may turn to “negative” coping strategies, such as reducing the number of meals or portion size, consuming lower quality food or taking children out of school so they might work to earn additional income.

With the cold winter weather setting in and no foreseeable end to the fighting, the outlook for people trapped in the conflict is grim. Humanitarian organizations are struggling to cope with the humanitarian situation, despite increasing the scope of the relief interventions. If developments continue on the current trajectory, the UN estimates that up to four million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria by early 2013.

Syrian Refugees

Meanwhile, people continue to flee across Syria’s borders, becoming refugees in neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and

LSESD is leading a multi-church initiative through partners within Syria, Lebanon and Jordan to assist families and individuals impacted by the Syrian conflict.
Turkey. The number of Syrian refugees in the region registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (or in the registration process) continues to grow and is 461,164 people as of November 27, 2012. By early 2013 this number is expected to reach about 710,000 people.

Depending on sources, the estimated number of refugees not registering with UNHCR is in the tens or hundreds of thousands in the region. On average, some 2,000 to 3,000 refugees per day have crossed into neighboring countries over recent weeks. Three quarters of refugees are women and children, many of whom have suffered terrible violence before they could flee.

In Lebanon

133,349 Syrian refugees are registered with UNHCR or are awaiting registration in Lebanon as of November 28, 2012. Other refugees are choosing not to register with the UN out of political fears (e.g. being seen as a traitor on their return to Syria and suffering repercussions). As a result of not registering, they do not benefit from the humanitarian assistance provided by the agency.

A recent positive development was the Lebanese government’s announcement to waive visa renewal fees for Syrian refugees, but the government has also expressed its hope that the international community would help to cover the lost revenue associated with those fees. Many new arrivals report that they have lost contact with family members since arriving in Lebanon or that loved ones have died in the violence. Some said they fled their homes quickly to escape fighting. Families who have relatives or friends in Lebanon tend to stay with them, putting an increasing burden on the host families as time passes. Others who have borrowed money or have some savings rent small apartments, sometimes sharing the space with other families, and are depleting their productive assets as they pay rent. Still others are less fortunate and take shelter wherever they can find it, in tents, dilapidated sheds, and other makeshift dwellings that often have no running water or electricity and do not provide adequate protection against the coming winter conditions. With little or no income or external support, refugee families (particularly those who are not registered) face crises regarding medical issues, nutrition, shelter, children’s education, and more. Many wish to return to Syria but do not know when it will be safe to do so, or what conditions they will return to.

In Jordan

Jordan sees several hundred refugees crossing its borders every day. New arrivals mainly consist of families with several children, including toddlers. More than half of the refugees are under 18 years old. There are 137,998 refugees registered with UNHCR or awaiting registration as of November 29, 2012, plus others are unregistered.

During the night of November 8 about 1,000 refugees crossed into Jordan – double the average daily arrival rate seen in the past few months. The increase arose amid reports of intensified fighting in southern Syria. In the past six months there have been 16 instances when around or over 1,000 Syrian refugees crossed into Jordan in a single night.

The flood of refugees has strained the resources of the Jordanian government and aid agencies. One refugee camp, Zaatari, has been established near the border with Syria, and limited resources have led to conditions so poor that numerous refugees have reportedly left it to find shelter elsewhere in Jordan. A second refugee camp is being prepared. The savings of Syrians renting apartments outside the camp are drying up. In a poll conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan in August, 2012, 65 percent of Jordanians opposed allowing any more Syrian refugees to enter the country.

Most Syrian refugees currently live in the governorates of Amman, Irbid and Mafraq. Arriving families recently reported that they have been internally displaced for the last six to 12 months and that they left Syria because they were no longer able to afford the cost of living where they were staying. Sixty three percent of Syrians registered expressed fear of return due to the general security situation, mainly fear of physical harm. Thirty four percent expressed fear of return due to their political opinion.

At the outset of the LSESD response the focus was on food, blankets and hygiene items. Developing relationships with the local churches and other partners led to an increased understanding of needs. As such, the project adapted the assistance given according to the various identified needs in several locations. In addition, new partnerships were developed, allowing the scope of the project to expand within Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.
Baptists in GAZA

a Wedding & a Funeral

Salem Boulos Sweilem, who attended the Gaza Baptist Church (GBC) in Gaza City, died November 19, 2012, of an apparent heart attack triggered by stress during a nearby bombing that shook his home. Israeli warplanes dropped four one-ton bombs on nearby Palestine Stadium, and the blast caused Sweilem’s building to shake. When the 45 year old father of four daughters and one son woke in a panic and could not breathe, his family wanted to take him to a hospital but had no transportation. They finally found a neighbor who had a car, but by then it was too late. He died while on the way to the hospital.

“Farid” of the GBC wrote on November 22, “We had a very difficult night yesterday all over Gaza city as well as all the areas.” He reported that many houses in Gaza were badly affected by the bombings.

Hanna Massad, former pastor of GBC who has been living in exile because of continuing tensions in Gaza, told the Baptist World Alliance® that “almost 40 percent of the people who have been killed in Gaza are children.”

The GBC building suffered only minor damage as a result of the bombing of the main police station in Gaza, which is only about 10-15 meters from the church building. “People are very fearful,” Massad wrote on November 20, indicating that Gaza residents were hopeful that rumors of a ceasefire would be true. A ceasefire was announced on November 21, ending the war that began a week earlier on November 14.

Baptists in Israel were largely unaffected by the war. Bader Mansour, executive secretary of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, told the BWA that “Baptists in Israel were far from this round of violence, as they are concentrated in the North of Israel and the violence was mostly in the South of Israel and the Gaza Strip.”

He stated that Israeli Baptists, who are mostly of Palestinian origin, were praying for their counterparts in Gaza and for their homeland. “We continue to pray for justice and freedom for the Palestinians and peace and security for Israel,” Mansour said.

More than 150 Palestinians and five Israelis died in the one-week war.

The Christian community in Gaza is estimated to be about 2,000 persons comprising members of three churches in the Gaza Strip – a Greek Orthodox Church, a Catholic Church and the GBC.

Mourners at the funeral service for Salem Boulos Sweilem at the Gaza Baptist Church who died during the war between Israel and Hamas

Hanna Massad, left, presiding at the wedding of Hanna and Janet Maher

Photo courtesy of Hanna Massad

I was blessed to encourage the believers at Gaza...

From: Hanna Massad
Sent: Saturday, September 15, 2012 2:13 PM
Subject: NEWS UPDATE

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you from Amman! I deeply appreciate your prayers and your encouragement during my week-long ministry trip to Gaza. The road between Amman and Gaza was much easier this time than everything I had to go through in the past.

Once again, I was blessed to be able to encourage the believers at Gaza Baptist Church, the staff and students at the Lighthouse School, and families throughout the community. We prayed together, shared devotions, and visited the sick and oppressed, in addition to helping the poor with food and medicine and meeting other needs as we could.

One of the high points of this visit was the privilege of conducting the marriage celebration for pastor Hanna Maher, the new shepherd of Gaza Baptist Church, and his lovely bride, Janet. Ministering with me were Pastors John Carlock and Bill Devlin. The wedding was held in the open air at the Gaza YMCA and was attended by hundreds of people. It was wonderful—a sweet and powerful reminder in the midst of the extreme hardship of life in Gaza that we are the Lord’s precious bride and that one day we will stand by his side at the greatest wedding feast the universe has ever witnessed.

This was my fourth trip to Gaza this year, thanks to God’s amazing grace and the generous gifts of good friends like you.

Thank you again for standing with us. It is an indescribable feeling and a great blessing to work together with you for the Lord’s glory and the advancement of his kingdom.

Gratefully,
Hanna, Suhad, Joyce & Jolene
Baptists in Lebanon appealed to the worldwide Baptist family to pray for the Middle Eastern country in the wake of a bomb blast on October 19. At least eight persons were killed, including Wissam al-Hassan, the country’s head of intelligence, and his assistant. An estimated 110 more were injured.

Nabil Costa, executive director of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD) and a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance®, said the situation in Lebanon “continues to be fragile with heightened emotions.” While things seemed to have calmed down after the bombing, he expressed anger and dismay at what had occurred. “We feel sad, outraged, afraid, and angry. As humans we cannot help but have these feelings,” Costa stated. “We thought our country had turned a new page, yet once again evil hands are back to haunt us.”

Costa said the bombing occurred during peak hour “when children were returning home from school, many employees returning from their work, or people were running errands.” As a result, “the level of destruction is unbelievable; families lost loved ones, casualties are lying in hospitals, with many in critical condition.” He said the situation “is [a] catastrophe especially that all of these families belong to the lower middle class or middle class and they are 90 percent not insured.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “We are severely disappointed that the relative peace Lebanon has experienced in recent years has been shattered by such a wanton attack without regard to the sanctity of life. Lebanon has opened its arms to citizens of other countries, such as Syria, that have experienced their own turmoil in recent times. Lebanese, including Baptists, have practiced the Christian virtues of hospitality and charity in the face of their own challenges and difficulties. It is incumbent upon the rest of us to remember the country at this time.”

The bombing is believed to be part of the fallout and spillover from the civil war in Syria, which shares a border with Lebanon. Thousands of Syrian refugees have been pouring into Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries since the Syrian civil war started in 2011. Al-Hassan, the head of the intelligence branch of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, was believed to be the target.

The attack occurred in Ashrafieh, an area of the capital Beirut that is mostly inhabited by Christian families. It is the first major incident in Lebanon in recent years. The country previously experienced years of turmoil. It went through a protracted civil war between 1975 and 1990, resulting in an estimated 120,000 fatalities, many thousands injured, and tens of thousands displaced.

In February 2005, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated in a car bomb explosion. The assassination triggered the Cedar Revolution, during which demonstrators demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. In July 2006, a 34-day war broke out between Lebanon-based Hezbollah and Israel that killed almost 1,200 Lebanese and about 160 Israelis.

The country has experienced relative calm since that war ended on August 14 of that year.

Costa asked for prayers for peace in Lebanon, that the Lord may keep the country and people safe from all evil plots and for families that were directly affected by the blast. He asked Baptists to remember Lebanon’s national and political leaders, for them to learn to coexist and work for the best interest of the country irrespective of their beliefs and despite their differences.

Costa expressed concern for the safety of students as they commute to and from school and for the safety of Baptist staff. He asked that prayers be offered for Baptists in Lebanon, “that we may continue in the work that the Lord has called us for in Lebanon and the region, with all enthusiasm no matter what.”

The Convention of the Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon, a member organization of the BWA, has approximately 1,600 members in 32 churches. LSESD, which is independent of but affiliated with the convention, operates and manages a number of Baptist institutions, including a publishing house, a theological college, a school, and a relief agency. LSESD has been a major BWA partner in relief efforts in the region.

Photo courtesy of: EPA/WAEL HAMZEH

Lebanese civil defense and Red Cross workers at the scene where a car bomb exploded in the Achrafieh Christian residential area in Beirut
The indigenous Bodo people of the Northeast Indian state of Assam appealed to the Baptist World Alliance® for prayer and support in the wake of ethnic clashes in recent months.

Thousands of Indigenous Assamese
DISPLACED AFTER VIOLENCE

Violence broke out in Assam in July between Bodos, who are mostly Hindus or Christians, and Bengali Muslims, mainly immigrants from Bangladesh, causing the deaths of at least 80 persons and the displacement of more than 400,000 who fled their homes and who lived in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. More than 5,000 of their houses were razed.

Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, sent a grant of US$10,000 for immediate relief. BWAid and the BWA Division of Freedom and Justice worked on a joint response to the crisis.

The violence broke out on July 10 after four local Bodo boys were hacked to death in Joypur, in Lower Assam, by a group of Bengali-speaking Muslims. This led to retaliatory arson and killings. The violence was brought under control by the Indian army over a period of three days.

Some 275 temporary camps were set up in schools, colleges, churches and temples to give shelter to the displaced. Isolated incidents of violence reportedly continued. India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited some of the IDP camps after the army quelled the violence.

An estimated 50,000 migrant Assamese and other Northeast Indians fled the Indian “mainland” as rumors spread that Muslim attacks were imminent in cities such as Mumbai and Bangalore. Most citizens of Northeast India are culturally and ethnically related to Southeast Asians such as Thais, Vietnamese, Filipinos and Chinese.

Nongovernment organizations and churches, including Baptists, one of the larger Christian groups in Assam, mobilized resources to aid the affected people. Local churches of the Boro Baptist Church Association, which is affiliated with the Lower Assam Baptist Union (LABU), a BWA member organization, contributed money, materials and labor during the relief effort.

“Most of the affected people could not save clothes, utensils, cattle/livestock, etc., except a handful of things and the clothes they were wearing,” the LABU reported. “They had to rush to safe places in order to save their lives. For the children the immediate needs are medical care, clothing, school books, supplementary food items (mainly for the babies), mosquito nets, hygiene and sanitary kits.”

The LABU estimates “it may take some months for the affected people to return to their homes,” and presented a project proposal for assistance. The project aims to aid 500 families or approximately 3,000 persons, with immediate relief, from September 2012 to the end of March 2013.

The LABU is based in Kokrajhar District, the center of the conflicts, where it is believed 100 percent of its members are Bodo. The LABU has approximately 41,000 members in 300 churches.

Another BWA member body in the state, the North Bank Baptist Christian Association, has more than 70,000 members in almost 1,000 churches, about 70 percent of whom are Bodo. The Assam Baptist Convention, another BWA member in Assam, has approximately 30,000 members in 335 churches.
The city of Goma in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), home to a large Baptist population, fell into the hands of the M23 rebel army in November 2012 after M23 engaged government troops in battle to control the city.

Baptist families displaced in GOMA

Mike Musafiri, director of Development and Relief Ministry for the Community of Baptist Churches in Eastern Congo, told the Baptist World Alliance® on November 20, “I can confirm that the town is under the control of rebels.” He said that some 4,000 Baptist families were among those that were displaced by the fighting.

“The humanitarian situation is pitiful,” he said. “There is no electricity, no water in some areas.” Some residents, he said, were fetching water from Lake Kivu, which was salty and unsafe for human consumption.

Musafiri reported that persons were unable to go to church on Sunday, November 18, because of the intensity of the fighting. “It was not possible to reach the church due to the bombs and gunshots between the rebels and the regular army.” Fighting was intense through November 20, but by the afternoon, “the town is very quiet, no gunshots, no bombs,” Musafiri said.

Schools were also affected. “Some schools opened their doors but many parents didn’t send their children to school fearing what can happen,” Musafiri said.

Many residents of Goma, including displaced persons living in IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps, crossed the border into Rwanda seeking a safe haven.

Pascal Ndihokubwimana, aid and development director of the Union of Baptist Churches in Congo, said that the Kanyaruchinya IDP camp, which housed some 16,000 displaced families, was emptied as its residents were told to leave. He said that on November 18, a female resident of the camp, which is about 10 kilometers north of Goma, informed him that police and camp administrators told residents on loud speakers to leave the camp as M23 rebel fighters advanced toward Goma. The people, she told him, fled the camp in panic. Many families got separated in the process. Ndihokubwimana’s informant told him that she was separated from three of her eight children.

A number of Baptist churches served as shelters for residents and IDPs, including Hekima Baptist Church, which housed as many as 150 persons. Many were from the Kanyaruchinya IDP camp as well as residents from areas in and around Goma such as Kibati, Kanyandja and Munigi. Ndihokubwimana told the BWA that “Hekima church’s compound and sanitary conditions are not designed to lodge such a large number.”

Some Baptist families housed displaced persons. Musafiri housed two such families at his home.

The March 23 Movement (M23) was formed in April 2012 when several hundred soldiers turned against the armed forces in the DRC, citing poor conditions in the army and the unwillingness of the government of the DRC to implement an agreement signed on March 23, 2009. That agreement, from which the group took its name from the date of the accord, integrated the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) into DRC’s armed forces. The M23 rebels, who are mainly from the CNDP faction in the army, have been active in North Kivu province, where Goma is the capital, fighting government forces and militias supported by the government.

On December 4, 2012, Musafiri told the BWA that M23 rebels had withdrawn their fighters from Goma and that Congolese army troops had returned and retaken control of the city. “The UN mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO) is continuing to monitor the withdrawal of the rebel group from the wider Goma area in accordance with agreements reached by the International Conference on the Great Lakes region,” Musafiri said. The conference was held in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, on November 24.

The DRC has been bedeviled by wars and conflicts going back decades. An estimated 5.4 million persons have died as a result of the conflicts, making casualties in the DRC the costliest in human lives since the Second World War.

The BWA has passed a number of resolutions on the conflicts in the DRC, which has the second largest Baptist membership in Africa, with more than 2.1 million members in 15 BWA member organizations. A 2011 resolution expressed concern about conflicts in the eastern part of the DRC due to “the struggle for access to and control of the region’s vast mineral resources.” The resolution noted that the DRC supplies 70 percent of the minerals used to make cell phones, laptops, and other popular electronic devices.

There is need, the BWA said, for “companies and individuals trading in minerals from Eastern Congo to work for peace and promote justice in the region” and for Baptists to advocate with companies “to create conflict-free supply chains and a conflict-free mining sector in Congo.”

Women and young girls are at special risk in the DRC, according to the resolution, with Eastern Congo described as “the most dangerous place in the world to be a woman or a girl” due to widespread rape and other forms of violent assaults.”
Olasupo Ayokunle, president and chief executive officer of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), told the Baptist World Alliance® on November 27, 2012, that the pastors died “in the recent bombing of the chaplaincy at the Command and Staff College in Jaji, Kaduna state.” A third pastor had to flee to the south of the country from the city of Maiduguri in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria after threats and assassination attempts on his life. “Many other souls were lost elsewhere in the country,” Ayokunle told the BWA.

The attacks were allegedly caused by Boko Haram, a jihadist group that seeks to establish sharia law in Nigeria, which has claimed responsibility for some of the bombings. The group has carried out a series of bombings against Christian churches and government facilities such as police stations. By early 2012, the group was responsible for more than 900 deaths. In June 2012, almost 200 Christians were killed in at least three church attacks in the states of Bauchi and Plateau, located in northern Nigeria, and Kaduna state, which is in the central part of the country. In one of the most recent attacks on October 3, dozens of persons were massacred in the town of Mubi in Adamawa state during a nighttime raid.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “The BWA is deeply concerned about the continuing attacks being perpetrated by extremist groups, in many cases targeting Christians. We are especially concerned about the unacceptable situation in Maiduguri, where it has been reported that Boko Haram is directing its aggression against Christians.” The BWA, he said, “unreservedly affirms peoples’ right to enjoy religious liberty and peaceful co-existence with people of all faiths. We continue to fear that the increasing frequency of eruptions of violence is leading to an increase in the number of casualties that can have a negative effect on the future of Nigeria as a nation.”

A BWA human rights team led by BWA Director of Freedom and Justice Raimundo Barreto traveled to Nigeria in early December to meet with government and church leaders. The trip coincided with the observance of BWA Human Rights Day on December 9.

In July 2012, the BWA passed a resolution calling for “a peaceful ending of all violence and abuse of human rights in Nigeria,” and encouraged “our Baptist sisters and brothers to continue to seek ways to promote peace and respect for all persons in Nigeria.” The BWA appealed to the government of Nigeria at all levels to ensure safety and security for all people in the country and encouraged “Baptists around the world to raise these concerns with their governments, religious leaders and persons of influence.” BWA member organizations were requested “to commit to relentless prayer for peace where there is violence in Nigeria.”

The NBC has spent more than US$100,000 to provide relief to those affected by the violence. “The Boko Haram sect is not using only bombs now, they are now using direct shooting of Christians from house to house . . .

The Boko Haram sect is not using only bombs now, they are using direct shooting of Christians from house to house . . .

Baptist Pastors KILLED in Nigerian Bomb Attacks

At least two Baptist pastors have been killed and a number of Baptist properties destroyed in violent attacks by extremists in Nigeria.

Olasupo Ayokunle, president and chief executive officer of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), told the Baptist World Alliance® on November 27, 2012, that the pastors died “in the recent bombing of the chaplaincy at the Command and Staff College in Jaji, Kaduna state.” A third pastor had to flee to the south of the country from the city of Maiduguri in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria after threats and assassination attempts on his life. “Many other souls were lost elsewhere in the country,” Ayokunle told the BWA.

The attacks were allegedly caused by Boko Haram, a jihadist group that seeks to establish sharia law in Nigeria, which has claimed responsibility for some of the bombings. The group has carried out a series of bombings against Christian churches and government facilities such as police stations. By early 2012, the group was responsible for more than 900 deaths. In June 2012, almost 200 Christians were killed in at least three church attacks in the states of Bauchi and Plateau, located in northern Nigeria, and Kaduna state, which is in the central part of the country. In one of the most recent attacks on October 3, dozens of persons were massacred in the town of Mubi in Adamawa state during a nighttime raid.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “The BWA is deeply concerned about the continuing attacks being perpetrated by extremist groups, in many cases targeting Christians. We are especially concerned about the unacceptable situation in Maiduguri, where it has been reported that Boko Haram is directing its aggression against Christians.” The BWA, he said, “unreservedly affirms peoples’ right to enjoy religious liberty and peaceful co-existence with people of all faiths. We continue to fear that the increasing frequency of eruptions of violence is leading to an increase in the number of casualties that can have a negative effect on the future of Nigeria as a nation.”

A BWA human rights team led by BWA Director of Freedom and Justice Raimundo Barreto traveled to Nigeria in early December to meet with government and church leaders. The trip coincided with the observance of BWA Human Rights Day on December 9.

In July 2012, the BWA passed a resolution calling for “a peaceful ending of all violence and abuse of human rights in Nigeria,” and encouraged “our Baptist sisters and brothers to continue to seek ways to promote peace and respect for all persons in Nigeria.” The BWA appealed to the government of Nigeria at all levels to ensure safety and security for all people in the country and encouraged “Baptists around the world to raise these concerns with their governments, religious leaders and persons of influence.” BWA member organizations were requested “to commit to relentless prayer for peace where there is violence in Nigeria.”

The NBC has spent more than US$100,000 to provide relief to those affected by the violence. “The Boko Haram sect is not using only bombs now, they are now using direct shooting of Christians from house to house . . .

Baptist Pastors KILLED in Nigerian Bomb Attacks

At least two Baptist pastors have been killed and a number of Baptist properties destroyed in violent attacks by extremists in Nigeria.

Olasupo Ayokunle, president and chief executive officer of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), told the Baptist World Alliance® on November 27, 2012, that the pastors died “in the recent bombing of the chaplaincy at the Command and Staff College in Jaji, Kaduna state.” A third pastor had to flee to the south of the country from the city of Maiduguri in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria after threats and assassination attempts on his life. “Many other souls were lost elsewhere in the country,” Ayokunle told the BWA.

The attacks were allegedly caused by Boko Haram, a jihadist group that seeks to establish sharia law in Nigeria, which has claimed responsibility for some of the bombings. The group has carried out a series of bombings against Christian churches and government facilities such as police stations. By early 2012, the group was responsible for more than 900 deaths. In June 2012, almost 200 Christians were killed in at least three church attacks in the states of Bauchi and Plateau, located in northern Nigeria, and Kaduna state, which is in the central part of the country. In one of the most recent attacks on October 3, dozens of persons were massacred in the town of Mubi in Adamawa state during a nighttime raid.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “The BWA is deeply concerned about the continuing attacks being perpetrated by extremist groups, in many cases targeting Christians. We are especially concerned about the unacceptable situation in Maiduguri, where it has been reported that Boko Haram is directing its aggression against Christians.” The BWA, he said, “unreservedly affirms peoples’ right to enjoy religious liberty and peaceful co-existence with people of all faiths. We continue to fear that the increasing frequency of eruptions of violence is leading to an increase in the number of casualties that can have a negative effect on the future of Nigeria as a nation.”

A BWA human rights team led by BWA Director of Freedom and Justice Raimundo Barreto traveled to Nigeria in early December to meet with government and church leaders. The trip coincided with the observance of BWA Human Rights Day on December 9.

In July 2012, the BWA passed a resolution calling for “a peaceful ending of all violence and abuse of human rights in Nigeria,” and encouraged “our Baptist sisters and brothers to continue to seek ways to promote peace and respect for all persons in Nigeria.” The BWA appealed to the government of Nigeria at all levels to ensure safety and security for all people in the country and encouraged “Baptists around the world to raise these concerns with their governments, religious leaders and persons of influence.” BWA member organizations were requested “to commit to relentless prayer for peace where there is violence in Nigeria.”

The NBC has spent more than US$100,000 to provide relief to those affected by the violence. “The Boko Haram sect is not using only bombs now, they are now using direct shooting of Christians from house to house . . .
Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance® (BWA), granted an initial sum of US$20,000 for relief to the Caribbean following the passage of Hurricane Sandy through the northern Caribbean and the United States.

Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands were the islands most affected by the late-season tropical cyclone. Haiti, which shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, suffered especially hard. Ronel Mesidor of the Haiti Baptist Convention reported that areas in and around Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince, were particularly affected. A number of church buildings, including those of the Duvivier, Damien, Leogane and Tigoave Baptist churches were flooded. At least one member of Tigoave Baptist Church died as a result of the hurricane.

Some of the walls of a school operated by the Mussotte Baptist Church collapsed and its roof was destroyed. Mesidor also reported that Baptists lost their homes and livelihood as many lost both crops and farm animals during the hurricane.

At least 52 people are reported to have died in Haiti because of Hurricane Sandy and an estimated 200,000 were displaced.

In Jamaica, Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU) General Secretary Karl Johnson said, “Sandy left a trail of destruction mainly in the southeastern section of the island. Parishes such as St. Mary, Portland, St. Thomas and Kingston & St. Andrew bore the brunt of Hurricane Sandy’s wrath.”

Jamaica was the first of the islands to get a direct hit from Sandy.

The JBU leader said one life was lost as a result of the hurricane “and severe damage [was] done to properties, crops, roads and the general infrastructure in several communities.” Johnson said “preliminary reports have indicated that about 15-20 of our (Baptist) buildings have been affected. We are looking at a conservative figure of almost $30 million (approximately US$330,000) to effect repairs.”

The eastern section of Cuba, including the city of Santiago, was hit hard by the hurricane, said Joel Dupont, president of the Baptist Convention of Eastern Cuba. He reported that there was “chaos in the city (Santiago)” and that “11,000 people have lost their roofs and consequently, everything in their homes as they have no protection from the rain.”

Many Cubans were without basic services as “there is no water, electricity, and since most homes use electric stoves, people are not able to cook even if they have food.” Dupont said electrical power was expected to be out for at least a month. Three pastors suffered personal loss to their homes, Dupont said. Dupont alleged that there was an outbreak of cholera in Maisi, in the most eastern point of Cuba.

The Cuban Baptist leader, even while bemoaning the suffering caused by the hurricane, said it provided an opportunity for churches to minister and show compassion. “But I know this is a great opportunity to serve people and to minister to them and to share our faith and hope in Jesus. Churches in Cuba are arranging a feeding center to feed people in their community,” the Cuban Baptist leader told the BWA. “[Churches] are using all their funds to help families in need regardless of their faith. They have four teams in place to visit the communities that have been damaged to see how they can help. [The] situation in [Santiago] is critical and desperate.”

In the Bahamas, Anthony Carroll, president of the National Baptist Missionary and Education Convention (NBMEC) said five islands – Eleuthera, Abaco, Exuma, Cat Island and Grand Bahama – suffered the brunt of Hurricane Sandy. Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, and New Providence, the island on which it is located, suffered minimal damage. The Bahamas comprises more than 3,000 islands, cays and islets.

The NBMEC was assessing the level of damage by liaising with Baptist leaders at the association level and was in touch with the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF), one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, to plan a coordinated relief effort.

Everton Jackson, executive secretary/treasurer of the CBF said many people in the Caribbean “are still in shelters and are in need of basic food items and clothing.” He told the BWA that while full assessments of the damage and needs were not yet complete, “initially there is dire need for food, water, and temporary shelter in some areas. We do appreciate the support of the BWA.”

Baptists providing assistance to victims of Hurricane Sandy in Santiago, Cuba

Cuba was hit hard.
While bemoaning the suffering, Cuban Baptists found an opportunity to minister.

Photos courtesy of Xiomara Reboyras-Ortiz
Baptists in the United States responded to the disaster caused by Hurricane Sandy.

The North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF), through its Disaster Response Network (DRN), put together information and resources to assist those most affected and created a special website to assist in the process. The DRN is a tool used by the NABF, one of six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance® (BWA), to avoid duplication and to better coordinate disaster response.

“I wish to convey to all Americans who have been adversely affected by the super storm in the Northeastern United States the concern of Baptists worldwide,” said BWA General Secretary Neville Callam. “I am pleased to have heard from George Bullard, BWA regional secretary for North America that the Disaster Response Network of the North American Baptist Fellowship is already in action to respond to this disaster. Together, we will seek to mobilize resources to respond to what is an urgent need.”

Bullard, who is also general secretary of the NABF, said he made contact with “many leaders of various Baptist denominational organizations from Virginia to Maine, in Canada, and as far west as Ohio to express our prayerful support to them. I have also asked them to feel free to contact us if the resources available to them are insufficient and they need the assistance of our network.”

American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (ABCNJ), which is based in one of the hardest hit states, attempted to be in touch with its 280 churches and 320 active clergy through email and social media. Efforts were hampered by loss of power as more than two million people within the region were without power for many days.

After early assessment, Lee Spitzer, executive minister and senior regional pastor of ABCNJ, confirmed that 34 churches were either damaged or destroyed and anticipated that as many as 90 churches in New Jersey suffered some kind of damage from the storm. “Damage from both wind and water has been extensive across the state, and in communities near the Jersey shore, where we have many churches,” many of which, he said, have older structures. The region’s Camp Lebanon also suffered damage and was projected to lose revenue due to camp and retreat cancellations.

The Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention had 30 persons in training by the American Red Cross and had volunteers in New York on standby. “We identified churches in Northern Virginia, Washington DC, and Baltimore to be on standby should they be needed for service,” said David Goatley, executive secretary-treasurer of Lott Carey.

Goatley said churches in New Jersey were housing community-wide services for residents affected by Sandy as well as a subsequent Nor’easter winter storm that affected the US northeast from November 7-10. “A number of churches and congregants in our [Lott Carey] network are without power, but their damage seems moderate,” Goatley told the BWA. “We have about a dozen churches in NY/NJ that are being activated for collaboration with the American Red Cross to provide relief support to survivors.”

A concern was the psychological trauma of those who were displaced by the storm or who were otherwise severely affected. “Many people continue to be dislocated and distressed because of loss and uncertainties for the future,” Goatley declared. “We are working with networks of pastoral care professionals in the region to collaborate around responding to the spiritual care needs that many people currently have and that will develop. Our experience in past disasters has taught us that the stress of the storms will result in a number of challenging ways – increases in substance abuse and addiction, domestic violence, depression, and more. We will resource our sisters and brothers with spiritual, personal, material, and financial support.”

The need for heating in the cold autumn was of urgency. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), even though it had few constituents and perhaps no affiliated churches in New York and New Jersey, purchased and distributed several dozen liquid gas heaters as well as fuel. Churches across the country donated so many winter clothes that the CBF indicated it was no longer accepting coats and other winter gear.
Baptists Flooded in Croatian Village

Toma Magda, president of the Baptist Union of Croatia and former president of the European Baptist Federation, reported that “because of huge rains in Germany and especially in Austria and neighboring Slovenia, all the hydroelectric power plants on the river Drava encountered a very serious threat and had to discharge overflow.” The result, he said, “was that the river broke through the embankment.” This was less than one kilometer from Puscine village where, “in less than two hours, water flooded the western part of the village,” Magda said.

Drava is a river in southern Central Europe that flows through several countries, including Austria, Slovenia and Croatia.

Several Baptist families and Baptist churches were flooded out. “One of our churches and several families were flooded,” said Magda. Families had little time to save belongings. “Police evacuated the people minutes before it was too late. They didn’t have time to save things or more valuable machines, or cars. The water level was rising one meter every hour. It was a very scary experience,” Magda said. The business place of two Baptists suffered extensive damage.

The passage of Hurricane Sandy led to the postponement of the 136th Annual Meeting of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention (DCBC). The DCBC placed its volunteers on standby, including its chainsaw, debris removal, and flood response units to respond to areas and persons affected. “Feeding and recovery volunteers are on alert status,” said Ricky Creech, executive director/minister of DCBC.

The Virginia Baptist Mission Board (VBMB) indicated that there was little need for a response in the state of Virginia, which suffered relatively little damage though it was affected by the storm. VBMB had, however, opened a disaster response staging area at the Fairview Baptist Church in Fredericksburg. It has also provided volunteers to assist a feeding unit in New York City.
More than 1,300 delegates from 22 countries attended the 8th Asia Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF) Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from September 4-8, 2012.

The congress, which drew on the diverse cultures represented within the APBF, opened in a spirit of celebration with dancing, singing, and inspirational messages.

Baptist World Alliance® President John Upton, keynote speaker on the second night, spoke on the congress theme, Stir Us Up Lord!, stating that God’s children cannot move if they are not stirred. Making reference to the parable of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Upton shared four principles that are at work in the life of the Christian believer. First, it is important to give what one has to Christ, no matter how insignificant it seems. Second, Christ blesses, consecrates and makes holy whatever is offered. Third, Christ often breaks us in order to open us up, an often difficult and painful process. “When God breaks our heart, the world gets changed,” the BWA president said. Fourth, God always gives back to the disciple who follows Christ.

Wood-Ping Chu, outgoing APBF president and main speaker during the opening celebration, asserted that as Christians face trials in life, they should remember that God is faithful. Chu reminded the hundreds of delegates of the words of the prophet Habakkuk, “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

BWA Regional Secretary for Asia and APBF General Secretary Bonny Resu emphasized the love of God in a region beset by natural and other disasters. These incidences, Resu declared, are opportunities for Christians in Asia Pacific to share the love of Jesus Christ. He asserted that the unique cultural diversity in the region enables Christians to share their resources through mission. He called on Asian and Pacific Baptists to seek ways to work cooperatively in mission.

A number of workshops were held to address challenges faced by Baptists in the APBF region. Delegates from a number of countries, including Japan, Philippines, Thailand and the states of Assam and Meghalaya in India, shared experiences in the “Mediating Peace” workshop. They told stories of how prayer helped to bring about peace. It was noted that the APBF helped to play a leading role in helping to broker peace in a number of instances, coordinating efforts not only among church bodies but also between nongovernment organizations and governments.

A workshop on “Violence and Interfaith Relationships” noted that violence by religious adherents stems from several factors, such as extreme religious ideology, a refusal to compromise with secular institutions, a perceived threat posed by globalization, and long historical frictions between religious groups. “Effective interfaith alliance comes through building trust, sharing resources and providing hope,” said workshop leader Victor Rembeth.

There is the need, he said, to “start dialogue with communities of different faiths so that the loving hands of Christ can be experienced by many.”

Interactive group discussions and presentations were made in a workshop dealing with child labor. Human trafficking, discussed in another workshop, was regarded as a serious issue that demands urgent attention. Statistics indicated that human trafficking is a major problem in Asia and elsewhere as millions are being sold into forced labor and the commercial sex trade. “God demands of us to focus on his justice and to stand up for the oppressed, marginalized, alien and poor,” said Asha Sanchu, who led the workshop on human trafficking.

Presentations were made on work being done in Myanmar and Bangladesh among marginalized groups. The role of social engagement in mission was highlighted. Participants were encouraged to take up the cause of those who are marginalized, including those ostracized by governments.

The “Ministering in Times of Disaster” workshop heard stories on the impact of disasters that have severely affected parts of Asia and the Pacific, with particular focus on the impact on vulnerable groups and habitats. It was made clear that Christians have a responsibility to respond in such instances. Emotional and psychological traumas often accompany natural and other disasters, said Kabi Gangmei, who leads the APBF response to disasters.

The “Doing Mission” workshop highlighted the diversity of mission, involving evangelism, relief work, children’s ministry, pastoral care, feeding the hungry and social justice, among other areas. The understanding and practice of mission should be biblical, emphasized Iwao Kochihira, who led the workshop.

The “Violence and Interfaith Relationships” workshop noted that violence by religious adherents stems from several factors, such as extreme religious ideology, a refusal to compromise with secular institutions, a perceived threat posed by globalization, and long historical frictions between religious groups. Effective interfaith alliance comes through building trust, sharing resources and providing hope, said workshop leader Victor Rembeth. There is the need, he said, to “start dialogue with communities of different faiths so that the loving hands of Christ can be experienced by many.”

Interactive group discussions and presentations were made in a workshop dealing with child labor. Human trafficking, discussed in another workshop, was regarded as a serious issue that demands urgent attention. Statistics indicated that human trafficking is a major problem in Asia and elsewhere as millions are being sold into forced labor and the commercial sex trade. “God demands of us to focus on his justice and to stand up for the oppressed, marginalized, alien and poor,” said Asha Sanchu, who led the workshop on human trafficking.

Presentations were made on work being done in Myanmar and Bangladesh among marginalized groups. The role of social engagement in mission was highlighted. Participants were encouraged to take up the cause of those who are marginalized, including those ostracized by governments.

The “Ministering in Times of Disaster” workshop heard stories on the impact of disasters that have severely affected parts of Asia and the Pacific, with particular focus on the impact on vulnerable groups and habitats. It was made clear that Christians have a responsibility to respond in such instances. Emotional and psychological traumas often accompany natural and other disasters, said Kabi Gangmei, who leads the APBF response to disasters.

The “Doing Mission” workshop highlighted the diversity of mission, involving evangelism, relief work, children’s ministry, pastoral care, feeding the hungry and social justice, among other areas. The understanding and practice of mission should be biblical, emphasized Iwao Kochihira, who led the workshop.

Jesus responded to the needs of people, he said. Knowing and addressing the needs of people is important, whether these be material, financial, environmental or educational.
By Tony Cupit

There is a good relationship in Melbourne, Australia, between the Baptist and Uniting Churches (UCA), a body that arose in 1977 as an amalgamation in Australia of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. On two occasions, in the 1980s and the 1990s, theological conversations within the State of Victoria (where Melbourne is the capital city) have been initiated. However, these left no lasting legacy, no reports were issued, and only the immediate participants were aware and affected. Baptists in Australia generally have little or no such theological conversations with other churches.

However, in 2006, the secretary of the Christian Unity Work Group of the UCA, Sandy Yule, approached the then National President of Australian Baptist Ministries (ABM), Gwyn Milne, about holding theological conversations at a national level between the two churches. Discussions began in 2007 and concluded in 2012 with the launch of the report of the conversations at a meeting of both churches attended by the General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, Neville Callam.

The UCA Work Group can negotiate on behalf of the UCA, but “Baptist structure and governance” does not provide a formal route for either the sanctioning of or adoption of the outcome of the dialogues. However, the dialogue was acknowledged by the ABM and the Baptist participants were recognized and affirmed as being “representative of Australian Baptist thought and practice.” The Baptist representatives were Milne, Ken Manley and Tony Cupit, all identified closely with the BWA.

A workshop on the Bible and biblical interpretation had an extended discussion on the meaning of interpretation. Miyon Chung gave an overview on the basic issues in hermeneutics, highlighting overarching principles such as the Bible’s context, the historical context and the interpreter’s context.

Tribute was paid to the first BWA Regional Secretary for Asia and APBF General Secretary Edwin Lopez, who died shortly before the start of the congress on August 31. Lopez, from the Philippines, was Baptist leader in Asia from 1980–1997.

A new executive was elected to lead the APBF over the next five years, led by Ross Clifford of Australia as president. Others elected included vice presidents Edwin Lam of Singapore, Dave Kwok from Hong Kong and Tapan Chowdhury of Bangladesh. Resu was elected to serve another five years as APBF general secretary.

A Development Consultation, a pre-congress event that was sponsored by a number of partners, including Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, explored how Asian Baptists can better serve the poor. Almost 200 delegates from 14 countries attended. Subjects examined included practicing distinctive Christian development; preparing for and managing disasters; and the place of a rights-based approach to development.

The 9th APBF Congress will be held in Indonesia in 2017.

As to why such an initiative between the churches was important, the report affirmed the importance of seeking a greater understanding of each other as “gift” through truthful sharing. This was recognized as one aspect of our own Christian discipleship. Of course there was no thought of abandoning traditional commitments or practice, but rather a willingness to be open to learn from each other. Both churches affirmed the vital nature of baptism as the point of entry into the fullness of Christian discipleship and both asserted that that baptism is “lifelong and unrepeatable.”

From the outset, while acknowledging our spiritual unity in Christ, the purpose of the conversations was to concentrate on practical issues that affect both churches, especially where there can be interaction and sometimes misunderstanding. Consequently the area of church membership was agreed upon as a suitable subject for scrutiny and discussion, and allied issues like baptism and covenant were thoroughly canvassed.

Both churches prepared a statement of their church’s historic approach to the issues of church membership, baptism and covenant. As a result, the representatives of each church responded to the other’s statement identifying points of agreement and of tension.

Five important questions were posed for distribution to the two churches:

1. How do we discern a readiness for baptism and church membership in those applying for baptism?
2. How do we understand our membership of a particular congregation to be related to our membership of the universal church?
3. What do we mean by the word “covenant” and how might this concept assist our practice of achieving and deepening church membership?
4. How should we deal with our differing stances on the baptizing of infants?
5. How might dialogue itself contribute to consolidating the reality of our common membership in the universal church, the body of Christ?

The report stated that the dialogue “had been marked by a high level of mutuality and personal sharing, a clear recognition on all sides of the continuing imperfections and inadequacies in the life of our churches and the positive value of our search together for clearer understanding of the will of Christ for His Church.”

Tony Cupit is a former director of the Baptist World Alliance.
Recent Trends in American Christianity

by Bob Terry

Contemporary and Innovative Worship

Contemporary worship began on the West Coast in the 1990s and spread across the United States. By the end of the decade, contemporary worship was the primary worship style for evangelical churches and was used by more than four out of 10 of all churches.

But contemporary worship did not always equate to church growth. During the decade innovation was added as well.

Innovative worship means different things to different people. For some it is praise music backed by electric guitars and rock-style drums. For others it is serving the Lord’s Supper every week or kneeling in prayer or using liturgies as part of worship. Innovative worship seems to refer to styles with which participants were not previously familiar.

The study found that innovation more than doubled the spiritual vitality of the worship experience. For example, among churches using contemporary worship the percentage of churches judged to have high spiritual vitality jumped from 23.2 percent to 46.7 percent when innovation was added. Among churches not using contemporary worship, the percentage of high spiritual vitality jumped from 17.4 percent to 38 percent when innovation was added.

Also the number of churches reporting rapid growth in attendance increased by about 50 percent when innovation was added to either traditional or contemporary worship styles.

Church is More than Worship

Increasingly churches are moving from “supporting mission” to “doing mission.” The survey asked about nine local mission programs to help evaluate local mission involvement. The study found an overall increase in local mission for all churches. The study also reported, “Most importantly, the net gain is the result of a significant increase for evangelical Protestant congregations such that the common wisdom that ‘liberal’ Protestantism was more involved in local social service work than evangelical Protestantism has now been reversed.”

Member-oriented programs also increased as churches concentrated on offering prayer groups, Bible studies, parenting and marriage enrichment classes, youth programs, musical opportunities and, especially, programs for young adults.

The study found that both the mission programs and the member-oriented programs positively impacted spiritual vitality and church attendance.

Decline in Financial Health

At the beginning of the decade, 31 percent of churches reported excellent financial health. In 2010 that percentage had dropped to 14 percent. The rate of decline in the second half of the decade was twice as fast as in the first five years. A full 80 percent of American churches reported their finances had been negatively impacted by the recession. Every kind of congregation in every part of the nation seemed to experience financial decline.

A hopeful finding was that by 2010, one in 10 churches reported they were beginning to recover from the financial recession.

High Levels of Conflict

The report bluntly declared, “One of the disturbing surprises was the dramatically high level of conflict found in American congregations. Almost two of every three congregations in 2010 had experienced conflict in at least one of four key areas in the past five years (worship, finances, leadership or priorities).”

The report added that in one-third of the congregations the conflict was serious enough that members left or withheld contributions or a leader left.

Conflict negatively impacts a local church. Churches with some serious conflict were twice as likely to have low spiritual vitality, serious financial difficulty and a 10 percent or greater decline in attendance.

Aging Membership

The median age of the American population increased from 35.3 in 2000 to 37.2 in 2010, primarily due to the aging of the

Who are the persons who have had “the greatest impact on Baptist thinking [in North America] over the last decades?” Hardly can unanimity be found in answers to this question. Yet, in his book, *Modern Shapers of Baptist Thought in America*, William Tuck dares to identify 24 persons chosen from church, academy, civil society and state to illustrate how these thinkers have influenced the course of Baptist life and to paint a portrait of their contribution to public life in his country.

The list includes persons chosen for their work as preachers, prophets, pastors, politicians and theologians. Tuck writes about John Broadus, Harry Fosdick, Gardner Taylor and Peter Gomes. His “prophets” include Walter Rauschenbusch, Henlee Barnette and Martin Luther King. He reports on the contribution of theologians such as Wayne Oates, Harvey Cox, Frank Stagg and Molly Marshall. He surveys the work of such pastors as Addie Davis, Rick Warren, Julie Pennington-Russell, political leader Jimmy Carter, evangelist Billy Graham and others. In 543 pages, Tuck draws upon extensive research to paint a portrait of each of the “shapers,” to identify major trends in their thought, and to characterize their legacy. Where else would one find a single volume that seeks to deal graciously with Baptists who are as diverse as Carlyle Marney and Jerry Fallwell, Harvey Cox and W. A. Criswell?

The book is dedicated to Fred Anderson, outstanding executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and the Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies. Anderson is accurately described as “a foremost interpreter and lover of Baptist history.” Readers will find *Modern Shapers* a readable and insightful work.
Baptist women from across North America gathered in Nashville, Tennessee, from October 3-6, 2012, for the North American Baptist Women’s Union (NABWU) assembly, which is held every five years.

The theme of the assembly was “thread.” Every element of the program weaved together the threads of connectivity that formed a tapestry of love, servanthood, and fellowship.

There were four present and former BWA Women’s Department presidents in attendance: Raquel Contreras, 2010-2015; Audrey Morikawa, 2000-2005; Mercy Jeyaraja Rao, 1995-2000; and Catherine Allen, 1990-1995, all of whom currently live in North America.

Contreras, current BWA Women’s Department president, brought the Bible studies each morning. Lauran Bethell, who works on behalf of and cares for women who have been exploited and abused, brought this issue to our minds, emphasizing the need for action and response.

NABWU has developed a new network of Baptist women who lead specific ministries that address the needs of women and their families throughout Canada and the United States. The network has grown to 70 women working in 14 ministry areas. There were 18 workshops offered at the assembly, 14 led by women from the new network. This assembly was the first opportunity for many of these networkers to meet face to face.

One of the workshops offered was *The Joy! Of Global Networking*. The BWA Women’s Department team presented this workshop, helping women see how they are a part of the global network, and what they can do to make a difference through the Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer.

Flashpoints is a multi-generational team that used dance, drama, and creative expression to celebrate God throughout the assembly.

Saturday, the last day of the assembly, was a day of doing business and a day of celebration. New officers were elected during the decision meeting and installed during a celebration luncheon. Moreen Sharp, new NABWU president, said: “Networking is a key initiative that needs to continue and grow ever stronger. As a North American organization, we have a unique place in networking women who are working towards bringing God’s heart and values to this world.”
As the Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer began in North America, reports were already beginning to arrive from the Baptist Women’s Union of the South West Pacific (BWUSWP). Julie Belding, president of the BWUSWP, shared that her church, Windsor Park Baptist Church in Auckland, New Zealand, had a “Day of Prayer afternoon tea.”

Sister Olga Mocan sent greetings to all Baptist women on the Day of Prayer, observed on November 5, 2012. She said, “This is a special day when Baptist women all around the world pray together. The program for this year is wonderful! May the joy that we have in Christ transfer to the ministry that we do for Him.”

The Baptist Women’s Fellowship of Washington, D.C. celebrated the day with a gathering of 130 people from 39 Baptist churches representing eight different national Baptist conventions.

The Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department Facebook page was used to post prayer requests on November 5, beginning with a prayer for all women around the world. There were many responses to this prayer. The Women at the Well at Cliff Temple, Dallas, Texas, USA, shared the following response: “Women at the Well make up another portion of our world. Diagnosed with a variety of mental illnesses, they joined the prayer yesterday and will be keeping up with the work of the Women’s Department. Women all over the world suffer with mental illness. We represent that population and are happy to join with the others of you in prayer.” T. J. Wheeler, BWA Women’s Department executive assistant, posted prayer requests every hour from each of the seven continental unions and the BWA.

Maria Guia de Oliveira Martins, coordinator of MCA Baptist Church in Maruim, Sergipe, Brazil, sent a detailed report about their Day of Prayer. They started planning for the event a month before the date and they spent three days preparing the church for the special event. A photo album of the day’s event may be found on the home page of www.bwawd.org.

The Baptist women of West Papua were blessed on the Day of Prayer. The focus on the Fruit of the Spirit, JOY, had a great influence on their lives. Sister Lena Wakerkwa shares: “The political situations, diseases, and poverty are major problems, and sometimes it makes our lives feel hopeless. After studying the program about the Joy of the Holy Spirit in our lives, it gave new hope to all of us.” Wakerkwa is the president of the Women’s Department of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches of Papua. On the Day of Prayer she joined with the Baptist women in the Wemena region. There were about 100 women who came to Yomaima Baptist Church to celebrate the Day of Prayer. They brought their offering, in joy they sang, prayed in small groups and had lunch together.

The Woman’s Missionary Union of Puerto Rico celebrated the Day of Prayer on Saturday, November 10. In Puerto Rico they have a special mission program for adults called “Adults on Mission” which is a program of the Woman’s Missionary Union and the Southern Baptist Convention. It was exciting to see women and men praying and giving in order to impact world for Christ.
Branko Lovrec

Branko Lovrec, a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance® (BWA) from 2005 to 2010, died on September 28, in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. He was 79 years old.

Lovrec served the BWA in a number of other capacities, including as a member of the General Council, the Executive Committee, the Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation, and the Human Rights Award Committee.

Lovrec had deep Baptist roots. His grandfather, Vinko Vacek, was a founder of organized Baptist work in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes during the first half of the 20th century. He was editor of the official Baptist periodical beginning in the 1960s in Croatia, and was elected the first president of the Baptist Union of Croatia in 1991, serving until 2003, following Croatia’s independence in 1991.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said that Lovrec had “made his mark on the international stage” and that his “contribution to Croatian Christianity was immense.” While mourning the passing of the Croatian Baptist leader, Callam told Baptists in the Central European country that the BWA was “encouraged by the level of faithfulness and commitment to the cause of Christ that was so evident throughout his life.”

Lovrec entered full time ministry in 1967 after being trained and working in the field of medicine. He was especially noted as an interpreter for visiting preachers to Croatia, including Billy Graham, and as a translator of the New Testament and other Christian literature.

He founded the publishing organization, Duhovna Stvarnost, which, among other volumes, published The Handbook of the Bible and The Encyclopedia of the Bible in the Croatian language. In 1982 Duhovna Stvarnost published Knjiga o Kristu, the first Protestant New Testament translation in Croatian to gain acceptance among the wider public. During the last years of his life, Lovrec worked on the translation and production of Our Daily Bread, booklets with daily devionals.

He served as president of the Protestant Evangelical Council and its antecedent, the Association of Evangelical Ministers. He cofounded the Croatian Bible Society and was elected its president in 1995. Lovrec was also cofounder and long time president of the Executive Committee of the Society for Religious Freedom, and was a member of several other organizations.

In 1999 the Croatian government awarded Lovrec with the Order of Danica Hrvatska with the face of Katarina Zrinski for his contributions to health, social welfare and the promotion of moral values.

He is survived by wife, Mirjana, sons, Matija and Andrija, and daughter, Iva.

Funeral services were held in Zagreb on October 3. A memorial service was held on October 9 at the Zagreb Baptist Church where he served as deacon and elder.

K.H. Ting

K.H. Ting, an Anglican bishop prior to China’s Cultural Revolution who led a “post-denominational” re-emergence of Chinese Christianity in the 1970s and 1980s, died November 22, 2012, after several years of poor health.

Hailed by some as a patriot and visionary, Ting, 97, worked through 60 years of change in the world’s most populous nation.

Ting was ordained as China’s last Anglican bishop in 1942, a position he never renounced and technically held until death, even though his church was effectively dissolved and merged with other Protestant denominations into the umbrella organization, the China Christian Council (CCC). The CCC also includes many congregations that were founded as Baptist churches.

Ting served as chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the liaison between church and state in China, and president of the CCC, the official Protestant denomination. He became president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1953.

He lost his positions during the Cultural Revolution, but returned to prominence in the wake of liberalizations following Mao’s death in 1976.

In 1985, Ting and others set up the Amity Foundation, a Christian faith-based organization that promotes education, social services, health and rural development across China. The foundation’s work includes the Amity Printing Company, a joint venture with the United Bible Societies launched in 1988 that recently celebrated the printing of 100 million Bibles.

The Baptist World Alliance® has had close ties with both the CCC and Amity. Representatives of CCC have attended every Baptist World Congress since the 1980s and have visited the international offices of the BWA in the Washington, DC suburb of Falls Church in Virginia on several occasions, most recently in 2010. These relationships were cemented following a BWA visit to China early in the decade of the 1980s. Subsequent visits by the BWA to China have been made, including the last visit in 2010.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam lauded the work of Ting in helping to preserve and shape Christian witness in China. “The legacy of this outstanding Christian leader is a thriving church in a country that has one of the largest Christian populations in the world. He represented an openness and faith that enabled the BWA to have close and cordial relationships with both the CCC and the Amity Foundation.”

Ting is credited with opening up the Chinese church to the outside world, including Amity’s Teachers Program, which recruits people from around the world sponsored by church agencies to teach English, Japanese or German in Chinese universities.

Farewell rites for Ting’s remains were held on November 27 in the city of Nanjing in eastern China.

With excerpts from a report by the Associated Baptist Press
Recently, I have had opportunity to be with the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation at their 8th Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and a chance to visit with the European Baptist Federation (EBF) at their annual Council meeting in Elstal, Germany. In preparing to speak at these events I was reading Ephesians 2 where Paul was addressing a conflict between the Jews and Gentiles in the church. He said,

“Christ, our peace, has made us one, he has destroyed the dividing wall.”

After reading that passage I acknowledged what I have always known, that we humans are specialists in building walls. On my travels for the BWA I have seen some pretty famous ones we have built. There is Hadrian’s Wall in North England built by Romans to keep out the Scots. It was 73 miles (117 km) and much of it is still standing after all this time. There is the notorious Berlin Wall. I joined a busload of the EBF community, led by EBF President Hans Guderian, to tour the place where the wall stood dividing the East and the West. There is the Israeli Wall alongside and inside the West Bank, barbed-wire, concrete, and 470 miles (756 km) long to contain the Palestinians. And on the southern border of my own country there is a double fenced wall stretching some 700 miles (1,126 km) from San Diego, California, to El Paso, Texas, to keep Mexicans out. And you know, don’t you, that when astronauts orbit the earth they can see only one thing with their naked eye that gives evidence of human existence. Know what it is? It is the Great Wall of China. It is all you can see up there of us. It is like our signature across the planet – a wall.

Then there are those walls that may not be so huge to the visible eye, but are just as real. I mean walls like racial walls, cultural walls, political walls, economic, educational, generational, international, regional, tribal, religious, and, of course, denominational and theological walls. We are spectacular at dividing and sub-dividing and sub-dividing again into more and more little pieces.

It is wonderful that we are different. The problem is that over and over our differences turn into divisions and divisions into exclusions. So, we live in these bizarre and damaging isolations.

We even do this in our families and with each other. If there is something about you I’m not sure I like or I’m not sure I trust, a little wall in my heart goes up. Hostile words and actions are not even required. Silences build up. Year by year, brick by brick, the walls go up.

The strangest of all are the dividing walls we build within ourselves so that parts of ourselves are actually blocked off from other parts of ourselves. This leaves us conflicted and paralyzed and frustrated. “I want to give a better gift, but I have needs, too.” “I want to forgive them, but I have my pride.” To be honest, the walls inside us and the walls outside of us are all inseparable.

My prayer is that there is something within us that doesn’t like walls and knows they are not good for anyone. Paul says it is the work of Christ within us that wants walls to come down. “Christ is our peace, who has made us one and who has broken down the dividing wall.” I love this image that the love of God in Christ is like a cruciform hammer crushing downward to break through the division between us and the Divine, breaking through to destroy all divisions between us. It turns out the disconnect between each of us and within each of us is rooted in our disconnect with the Divine. Christ demolishes both dimensions.

Many of us couldn’t take our eyes off of the television in November of 1989 when a party broke out in Berlin with young people dancing on top of the Berlin Wall. There were thousands and thousands hammering at it with their chisels. Gates that were locked for so long were opening. There were millions of people streaming into the streets with so much singing and laughing and weeping. Enemies and strangers were embracing one another like long-lost friends. It wasn’t hard to see him that night, Christ, leading the dance on top of a doomed wall turning enemies and strangers into new friends.

Christ has summoned us to this kind of work. Christ is our peace. He is making us one.
Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre

Baptist World Alliance
www.bwanet.org

Meet, fellowship & worship with Baptist youth from around the world.

reach
16th Baptist Youth World Conference

A life-changing experience. Youth strengthened . . . encouraged . . . emboldened

SINGAPORE
July 17–21, 2013

Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre

Baptist World Alliance
www.bwanet.org

facebook twitter