Earthquake in Indonesia: Baptists on the Scene

SPECIAL REPORT
Norman Kember Kidnapped in Iraq
The cooperation and coordination between many Baptist groups who responded to the tsunami has led to networking and mobilizing resources.

It has created new opportunities for church organizations and their communities to connect with communities in need.

BWAid and other Baptist agencies are now better equipped to deal with the next crisis, and will continue to work collectively and collaboratively together.

Some funds should be retained for long term housing, livelihood and community development.

Baptist ‘tsunami stakeholders’ met in Bangkok, Thailand in early May 2006.
5 Baptists in Vietnam

The amazing story of Brazilian Baptist churches: active and growing, with vision and excitement in their commitment to mission.

9 The Lahus of Thailand

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12 A British Baptist in Baghdad

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Reports of inspiration, challenge, tragedy and praise from our diverse Baptist family.
Recovering the Meaning of Believers’ Baptism

The Baptist movement began in the 16th century as a reaction to the State Churches of Europe that practiced infant baptism, whereby a baby automatically was baptized and became a member of the church. In fact, the state and church were so united that the pastor, Catholic or Protestant, often became the official of the state registering births.

The Baptist rediscovery of believers’ baptism as the New Testament way of entrance into the church was not merely a rediscovery of ritual and method. Rather, believers’ baptism was the sign of Baptist belief in a redeemed church, a church composed of born again individuals who by their lives and confession declared Jesus Christ as Lord.

Believers’ baptism was a call for a new reformation, a call to individual appropriation of God’s grace in Christ. The practice of believers’ baptism thus had important implication for our whole understanding of the church. A new ecclesiology followed a rediscovery of New Testament baptism. It followed that since baptism was an institution of the body of Christ, not of the state, there were serious consequences for the church and the individual over against the state and culture. Therefore, Baptists called for the separation of the church from the state.

Furthermore, if baptism became a personal response to the grace of God offered to us in Jesus Christ and our response to the moving of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual, no state, church, or other institution could think for or decide for the individual. This held significance for affirming the freedom of conscience of an individual. The early English Baptist, Thomas Helwys, made bold this affirmation when he wrote the king saying that the king had no right to rule over the conscience of an individual. Such thinking had great consequences for Western society’s understanding of freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and freedom of the press, as defended by the Baptist author, John Milton, in Areopagetica!

It behooves Baptist leaders and Baptist people in every generation to renew our deeply held belief in the importance of believers’ baptism of the individual. We need to remind ourselves of the great Baptist truths that have grown out of this rediscovery and have influenced all of Christianity: Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Conscience, Separation of Church and State, and the church as the beloved community of regenerate members.

At our own peril, we give up these formative Baptist principles and doctrines by trivializing baptism and making it a cultural ritual, similar to infant baptism. When Baptist churches make baptismal fonts in the form of a fire truck and have confetti cannons go off when five year olds come out of the baptismal waters, the whole point of believers’ baptism as practiced in the New Testament is missed and, in fact, negated! Furthermore, those churches that baptize children five years of age or even younger are unwittingly caving into a theology of infant baptism that maintains that somehow this ritual has salvific effect or saves! Again, early Baptists believed that one should at least be at the age of accountability before one is baptized.

Having been a missionary in Eastern Europe, I rediscovered the seriousness of New Testament baptism and the requirements this put upon us. No fire truck or confetti greeted the believer. Rather, baptism in totalitarian countries reminded one of the first century where persecution and being thrown to the lions was the norm. Baptism in most parts of the world is a radical break with one’s culture, religion and tradition. It is a visible sign of an inward grace whereby the believer publicly declares that he or she is taking his or her stand in life or death to follow the way of the cross! As Bonhoeffer reminded another generation, “When Christ calls a person, he bids that person come and die!”

Baptist believers everywhere need to return to a scriptural view of the tremendous responsibility and consequence that entering the baptismal waters has for the individual, the church and society. The trivialization of believers’ baptism contributes to a cultural form of Christianity that wants Christ without the cross and cheapens the grace of God in Christ. Let’s study scripture and return to the real meaning of baptism, being buried with Christ and raised again to new life!
A BROAD SMILE, TEAR-MOISTENED EYES and animated motions communicated what Thai Minh Lang was trying to tell the visiting Baptist World Alliance Human Rights Delegation even though he could not speak English. “Thai has been a Baptist for 84 years,” the translator told us, “and he cannot contain his joy that he has lived to see Baptists gather publicly again in Vietnam.”

When 600 Baptist leaders from across Vietnam crowded into the 500-seat ballroom at the Majestic Hotel for the Baptist World Alliance Christian Fellowship Dinner, it was the first time such a large group of Baptists had met together in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam since the end of the war in April of 1975. A pastor from Hanoi traveled two days on his small motor bike. Tribal Hmong pastors came from the mountain regions. After 31 years, Baptists came out of the shadows to find that there are now five organized Baptist groups in Vietnam with a reported 821 churches or house churches meeting with approximately 50,000 members.

The BWA Fellowship Dinner at the Majestic Hotel in the center of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) was the culmination of (Continued next page)
There are now five organized Baptist groups in Vietnam with approximately 50,000 members. The BWA delegation brought the divergent groups together for the first time.
international delegation of Baptists and a representative group of all Vietnamese Baptists have been able to present to the government their concerns for legal recognition of their churches and organizations,” declared USA Vietnamese Fellowship President, Hue Nguyen.

Prior to the visit not even all Vietnamese Baptist leaders knew that there were five organized groups of Baptists in Vietnam. Noting that the BWA delegation had brought the five divergent groups together for the first time, BWA Asian Secretary Bonny Resu said, “We hope this will be the beginning of new relationships between the five Vietnamese Baptist groups.” Future talks are scheduled with the groups in Chiang Mai, Thailand, at next year’s Asian Baptist Federation meeting.

In addition to meetings between the delegation, Vietnamese Baptist leaders, and the Vietnamese government, the trip also included the opportunity to raise matters of religious freedom with diplomatic representatives of the USA, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. All emphasized the importance of freedom of religion to the world community as Vietnam takes its place as an important participant in the world’s economic and political affairs. Each promised to help Baptists in their struggle to be legally recognized by the Vietnamese government.

Vietnamese Baptist leaders were greatly encouraged by the visits with their government representatives and the diplomatic community, and some have already received assurances from the Department of Religious Affairs that they will receive legal status as early as this summer.

Jack Snell, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Interim Missions Coordinator and an eleven year member of the BWA Freedom and Justice Commission, believes “the major import of this trip has been about building relationships – relationships between the five Vietnamese Baptist groups as they relate to each other, relationships to the world family of Baptists, and relationships between Baptists and the Vietnamese government.”

Texas Baptist’s Patty Lane said, “In addition to meeting with the government officials and gaining a greater understanding of the positions and policies that affect religious affairs in Vietnam, we also were able to visit the Baptist leaders in Vietnam. We had the opportunity to hear their heart for the Lord and their love of their people and country. Our desire is to continue to
The major import of this trip has been about building relationships – relationships between the five Vietnamese Baptist groups as they relate to each other, relationships to the world family of Baptists, and relationships between Baptists and the Vietnamese government.

build on these new relationships so that the Baptists in Vietnam will be able to be linked to the Baptist family worldwide.”

“As exciting as it was for me to get to preach on Saturday night to the largest gathering of Baptist leaders in 30 years in the ballroom of Majestic Hotel (600), it was equally exciting to preach to the 25 gathered for worship the next morning in their house church in the suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City,” said Stanford. “To see the joy, sincerity, faith and faithfulness of people who had endured many difficult years of persecution for their faith and to worship with them was a humbling experience,” Stanford noted.

At the BWA dinner on Saturday night, May 20th, Vietnamese Baptist leaders and other Vietnamese Christian leaders, both Protestant and Catholic, were encouraged to continue to work with commitment as other Christians prayed for them and stood alongside them. Vietnamese musicians led in singing and each member of the delegation brought words of greeting. Coffey was to have addressed the group, but the sudden loss of his mother forced him to return to Britain on Friday to be with his family. In his place, Stanford discussed the nature of Baptists and Baptists’ historical desire for religious freedom, and closed with Jesus’ Parable of the Talents. “Though the needs in Vietnam are great and the resources of the Vietnamese churches may seem small, the important fact is not who we are or what we have, but who God is and what God can do if in faith we take what we have and place it in God’s hands.” A check from Baptist World Aid was also presented to build two new houses for the poor in Ho Chi Minh City as a gesture of Baptists’ desire to be allowed to help build a stronger and better Vietnam.

The participants in the delegation were David Coffey, President of the BWA; Alan Stanford, General Secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship and BWA’s Regional Secretary for North America; Bonny Resu, Asian Baptist Federation Fellowship General Secretary; Charles Wade, Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director; Jack Snell, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Interim Coordinator of Global Missions; Patty Lane, BGCT Intercultural Ministries Director; Robert Dando, British pastor and Executive Assistant to Coffey; Hue Nguyen, President of the National Vietnamese Baptist Fellowship USA; Dao Tran, President of the Vietnamese Theological Institute; and John Nguyen, President of the Vietnamese Baptist Fellowship of Texas.
CHIANG DAO, THAILAND: What a joy to participate in the annual mass meeting of the hill tribe people called the Lahus. About 4,000 Lahu Baptists gathered at Chiang Dao, Thailand, for their annual meeting in March. Chiang Dao is about 45 kilometers from Chiang Mai where next May 2007, Asian Baptists will hold their congress. (Asian Baptist secretary, Bonny Resu, says that Baptists worldwide are all invited!)

Every year these industrious tribal people have an annual mass meeting and cut a large camp out of the bush area where, for a week, thousands celebrate their faith in Christ through music, praise, preaching, and workshops. This year the women and youth had special meetings. Baptist health workers gave seminars on fighting HIV/AIDS. Pastors met to consider future plans for ministry. Enthusiastic choirs sang from the many churches. It was a mixture of young and old who gathered and sat in rows upon rows on the ground covered with straw in a large structure built specifically for the occasion. What a joy to bring greetings from Baptists of the world to these people. They are proud to be members of the BWA!

(Continued next page)
“I have decided to follow Jesus”

At the conclusion of the Saturday morning meeting, 77 young people were baptized. We drove in cars, open air trucks and motor bikes to a bend in the river, about 15 kilometers from the camp site. The ride was no obstacle for the brave young men and women as we finally came to a natural pool in the bend of the river.

What a beautiful sight to see these young men and women line up for baptism. Their names were called out one by one by a pastor, making sure that their names were recorded on the churches’ list for baptism. I believe their names were already recorded in the book of heaven!

Eight ordained pastors were in the river and baptized the candidates one by one. Those being baptized folded their hands in prayer as they were immersed in the water and baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As they came out of the water, those on the shore of the river began to sing, “I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus! No turning back, no turning back!”

It is always a very moving experience to witness baptism of young people whether in city churches or out in the jungle. One thing is for sure, believer’s baptism captures that New Testament model and the command given to Paul: “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

A story of grace of how a hill tribe people became followers of Christ

Today there are thousands of hill tribe people throughout Asia who have come to Christ. As one moves from West to East there is an amazing story of the hill tribe peoples of Asia coming to Christ. Starting with the Nagas and Mizos in India, then moving on to the Karens, Pwo Karens, Chins and Kachins in Myanmar, and then on to Thailand where the Karens, Lahus, Wa and Ataka are coming to Christ, one experiences the fruit of one hundred years of pioneer missionary work!

Students of missions speak of the 10/40 window, or World A, the unevangelized people of the world. Yet right in the midst of these millions of unevangelized people, there is a great window of hill tribe people who have come to Christ. Probably the Nagas and Mizos of India and the Karens of Burma are the most well known. But, many other tribes have come to Christ through the movement of the Holy Spirit working through Baptist missions.

The Lahus, whom I visited on this trip, have a one hundred year history of following Christ. One hundred years ago in 1904 the American Baptist missionary, William Marcus Young, began to preach in the marketplace in the Chan state of Burma. A young Lahu, who along with his family had migrated from China, was so moved that he accepted Christ and went home to tell his wife who became very angry. He told his wife not to get angry but to come with him and also listen to the Gospel preached by the missionary. She went to the market and also received Christ. So began the work among the Lahus.

The Lahus were originally from China. There is a story among the Lahus that they had a prophet who told the Lahus that they could not find God, but they should live good lives and wait for a message. The prophet told them, “A white man on a white horse with white books will come and tell you about God. Throw away your old religion and accept this new message.” This is a story that circulated many years ago and early converts remembered this admonition from their oral tradition.

There are about one million Lahus in the world: 450,000 in China, 200,000 in Myanmar, and more than 100,000 in Thailand. Many have immigrated to North America with a large community in Visalia, California. The work among the Thailand Lahus began with American Baptist missionaries Paul and Elaine Lewis who in 1973, having been expelled from Burma as missionaries, moved to Thailand and worked with the Lahus, helping them to form the Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention (TLBC). The TLBC has 86 churches with 8,500 baptized believers. Unfortunately, due to challenges in leadership and different language groups among the Lahus, in 1996 a group of Baptists split off and formed the Thailand Lahu Christian Churches with about 41 Baptist churches and 3,000
members. Another Baptist group, the Thailand Lahu New Testament Churches, with about 2,000 members, was also the result of a breakaway group. (Unfortunately, Baptist ecclesiology that emphasizes local autonomy often breeds breakaway groups when there is a conflict in leadership. This is true in many parts of the world, for example, recently among Cambodian Baptists. But this is a theme for another study!)

Special guests at the recent Lahu Baptist mass meeting were two Lahu Christians from China. The Lahus originally came from the Yunan province in China, an autonomous region. The two Chinese Lahu delegates brought greetings that were warmly received. Of the 450,000 Lahus in China, 30,000 have come to Christ and the numbers are growing daily. In Burma there are 28,000 Lahu Baptists.

Lahu Baptist medical officers train the people in hygiene and good health practices. In Chiang Mai there is a Lahu Bible Institute with 27 students. Many of the 67 pastors have studied there or at other Bible institutes in Thailand. The Lahus have a history of only ordaining a few of their pastors. Thus, of the 67 pastors, only 8 are ordained. Only they can baptize and serve the Lord’s Supper. To a certain extent they function as the early church bishops did.

Biblical faith always expresses itself in building up social structures and meeting social needs. A New Life Center where Lauran Bethell, 2005 BWA Human Rights Award winner, did mission work, helps young women stay away from the evil kidnapping and enticements to earn money by being prostitutes in Bangkok. Two Lahu Baptist women, Faye Wimosuksuwan and Nitaya Jayeu, assist in this mission. One of the older Lahu Baptist saints is Sakda Hasuwan, my translator, who heads up an organization, Thai Tribal Crafts, which gives employment to many tribal people as they make beautiful handicrafts to be sold worldwide.

It is interesting to note that the Lahus are not a patriarchal society but have had gender equity for many years. Thus it was no surprise that a woman was ordained as a pastor during this mass meeting. Pray for the General Secretary of the Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention, Philip Singko, who along with his wife, Shela, works to bring unity and harmony among the Lahu Baptist communities.

The Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship (TBMF) is a wonderful association of Baptist missionaries who work in Thailand and is concerned with evangelizing the hill tribes and other groups. Working among the Lahus are American Baptists, Australian, Swedish, British and Japanese missionaries. Eiji Asato, President of the BWA Youth Department, is a missionary to Thailand from the Japan Baptist Union. The Norwegian Baptists have recently sent a young couple, Oyvind and Phetsamai Hadland from Stavanger, Norway. Phetsamai is originally from Laos and received Christ in a Thai refugee camp and then moved to Denmark. In a Bible school she met her husband and now, together with their two small children, they are learning the Thai and Lahu languages so they can work among the tribal people. Indeed, God is raising up young, committed followers of Christ to continue to strengthen the church worldwide!

It was good to see how many various groups are working together to build up the discipleship of the tribal people. Rodney Cavett of the International Commission was at the mass meeting, representing a parachurch group from Texas that encourages church-to-church partnership in evangelism. Also, many Korean Presbyterians participated in the meetings with excellent and enthusiastic preaching. Lahus from California came back home to help their people in Christian growth! Thank God for the cooperative spirit that is growing worldwide among many Christian believers and mission agencies whose primary goal is to evangelize and bring men and women to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior! That’s what the Baptist World Alliance is all about.

Pray for the hill tribe people in Asia and for the Lahu Baptists in Thailand!
Kidnapped in Iraq

On November 26, 2005, Norman Kember and three other Western peace workers with Christian Peacemaker Team (American Tom Fox and Canadians James Loney and Harmeet Singh Sooden)

A British Baptist in Baghdad

By Norman Kember

I am embarrassed at having achieved a degree of fame (notoriety?) not for what I have done but for what was done to me. Yes, I made the decision to go to Iraq as a member of a Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) Delegation, but nine such CPT groups had been to Iraq without a kidnapping incident. I went to Baghdad to discover the effectiveness of such delegations, to meet Iraqis, and partly to prove that at age 74 I was not past taking adventures in my faith as a pacifist.

Since being a conscientious objector to military service, I have always held that the development of nonviolent solutions to conflicts at personal, national and international levels is an integral part of Christianity. I see the teaching and actions of Jesus from the temptations to the cross as examples of nonviolence. Only by good is evil overcome (Paul in Romans). There are, I know, some contrary arguments based on certain texts, but the overall message of the gospel is one of costly love in action for peacemaking. It is an essential part of the good news.

As it worked out, I only had three days of meeting Iraqi people before the kidnapping. The best visits were the meetings with workers at the power station who were pleased to encounter friendly Westerners and with Fr. Douglas and the young people at the St. Mari Catholic Church.

Once in captivity our contacts were limited to three ‘minders’ and one man with some authority in the insurgent group. Within the deprivations of captivity, we were treated humanely and without physical violence apart from handcuffs and chains. I recall the time when one minder brought us a fragrant rose from the garden while another came in with a Christmas cake. They showed us a DVD of the life of Jesus (in Arabic), but in other DVDs made by their insurgent group they were proud to show us many acts of violence against British and American troops. They were members of the group responsible for the death of the Quaker Tom Fox.

The act of release was ironic – we came in peace and were freed by the SAS – perhaps the team within the British military most renowned for violence. I did thank them for my release and acknowledged their courage, but there are many sorts of courage. The bravery of the CPT members who stayed in Baghdad until our release—at risk each day and without armed protection—was of another order of bravery.

In supporting my wife, Pat, our Baptist church was magnificent. Our minister’s wife came to the house to stay the night with Pat when the news of the kidnapping was first announced. The minister, Bob Gardiner, was a wise counsellor throughout the period of captivity. The church members were understanding and gave their assistance in quiet ways that did not distress Pat. Prayer vigils were held every day for the first month and then every week thereafter. The wider Baptist family in Britain took up regular prayers for us, lit candles and attended vigils. We
also had letters and cards from Italy, Australia, the USA, Chile and the Czech Republic. Some of these people we met at the Baptist Peacemakers stall at the BWA Congress at Birmingham. The worldwide circle of prayer that was established is the Church at its finest.

Many Christians joined in prayer vigils, but foremost were the Christian Peace Groups with whom I had had connections in the past. Members of Pax Christi, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Movement to Abolish War and the Quakers met regularly to plan vigils and press campaigns. These vigils took place in many British cities and were attended by Christians of all denominations. Pat had weekly phone calls from the CPT office in Chicago to exchange news while other members of the CPT phoned during the period of captivity.

This brings me to an important group—the Muslim community in Harrow and Britain. We know that Anas Al Tikriti of the Muslim Association of Great Britain went to Iraq immediately after the news of the capture was known. He was born in Iraq and used his local knowledge to seek out any information on the kidnappers and to make pleas on our behalf. He reassured the people of Iraq that we were their friends and not in any way connected with the Coalition Forces. When I arrived back in Britain I was overwhelmed by the discovery of the amount of support we had in prayer, in vigils and other activities.

How has my faith been affected? My faith in the supportive fellowship of the church has been enhanced, but God remained largely veiled during those months of captivity. Did God speak when I was depressed and lost hope of release? During our period of prayer I found myself saying “When I get back to Pinner (home)....” so hope was not dead in me. I renamed God, ‘When I get back to Pinner’ (Cf. Exodus 3 v 14).

I found that the Baptist pattern of spirituality was not helpful, particularly with its modern trend toward triumphalism in worship. Psalms similar to Psalm 22 and hymns such as ‘My song is love unknown’ spoke more to my condition. I have never been able to meditate for very long—my mind keeps wandering. Perhaps the Roman Catholic and Quaker traditions would be more helpful in conditions of enforced introspection. We four captives generally kept to a pattern of daily worship and study (endeavouring to recall the biblical passages with sufficient accuracy), but the most faithful in devotion was Tom Fox. We knew that there were people praying for us, but there is evidently no simple relationship between prayer and its answer. Why were only three out of this group of four captives released?

One general question is worth asking—why did this particular misfortune evoke such a wide-ranging response when Christians take risks for their faith in many situations at home and abroad? What stirred the imagination of the public? The secular media certainly gave much coverage to the kidnapping and to the release (they are still chasing me for further interviews). The publicity raised the issue of Christian Peacemaking in the media in order to explain the reasons why I went to Baghdad.

In the weeks since I returned home I continue to learn of other occasions when people from different backgrounds and faiths came together. I pray that such links may be developed. Discussions of nonviolence were facilitated. For example, the International Baptist Theological College in Prague held regular prayers for the captives and the principal was able to introduce Christians from Eastern Europe to the biblical basis of nonviolence, a topic which they had never encountered before. The ways of God are very mysterious!
Indigenous Mission Project

Europe’s revolutionary church planting program

By Daniel Trusiewicz

The European Baptist Federation, with the generous help of its Mission Partners, has developed an indigenous mission project (IMP) to facilitate evangelism and the planting of new Baptist churches in Europe and the Middle East. The IMP provides funding for suitably gifted people to work as evangelists and church planters in their own countries.

The project to support indigenous missionaries was launched in April 2002, in Moldova. In January of 2003, the IMP was extended to five other countries of Eastern Europe: Armenia, Belarus, Latvia, Russia and Ukraine. The project has been the response of the EBF to the needs of nations that are open to the Gospel.

In the beginning of 2004, it became possible to expand the project to the Middle East, and thus, to answer requests from the Arab-speaking countries in this region, where indigenous missionaries are successfully planting new churches. In 2005, EBF approved several candidates to be missionaries from the following countries: Azerbaijan, Egypt, Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania and Serbia.

Currently there are over 50 indigenous missionaries aided by the EBF in their ministry of planting Baptist congregations. They serve in various areas – both urban and rural – and under different circumstances.

Some of the missionaries work in the cold of Russian Siberia above the Polar Circle. Others are part of rapidly growing Baptist unions in the mountainous Caucasus region. Some toil in spite of legal obstacles in Belarus, while others represent the exceptionally mission-minded Baptist Union of Moldova. Others are taking advantage of opportunities presented by the newfound freedom in the Baltic countries recently accepted into the European Union, as well as in Ukraine, home to the largest Baptist convention in Europe.

The experience of IMP confirms that indigenous missionaries are the most effective in their ministry. They know their people, culture and language, and this contribute to their success. The overall goal of IMP is to unite Baptists in making Christ known among the diverse nations, languages and cultures of Europe and the Middle East.

The EBF organizes the project in cooperation with its member unions. The unions are responsible for the selection of church planters as well as their theological education and spiritual oversight (mentoring). The unions often arrange missionary conferences that provide excellent opportunities for training and fellowship and refocus the vision of church planters. Good cooperation
with Mission Partners is crucial for the EBF church planting project.

It is indeed encouraging to see that the indigenous missionaries are highly motivated and eagerly implement contemporary methods of evangelism, using Bible study guides, tracts, Christian concerts, Jesus films, English language courses, summer camps, sport activities, etc. They utilize opportunities skillfully, teach biblical doctrines diligently, and form new groups effectively. EBF-supported indigenous missionaries are starting new churches and the project is already bearing significant fruit in changed lives and transformed communities.

The experience of IMP shows that two years are enough to find people to plant a church (such as Armenia, Moldova or Ukraine), but the process of discipling requires much more time, a minimum of five to seven years. However, in Lithuania, it takes much longer – a minimum of 15 years passes before a newly planted church becomes self-supportive. It is reckoned that bringing someone to faith takes only about twenty percent of the total effort, but the follow-up requires the remaining eighty percent.

The Baptist unions’ leaders are greatly appreciative of the IMP because it helps to maintain the quality and regularity of the missionary work.

There are some outside obstacles such as repressive laws in Belarus that require churches to re-register, and prohibit religious meetings in homes. In Russia, great distances between inhabited areas of its vast territory are a natural hindrance to Baptist work. Prevailing poverty and high unemployment rates hamper evangelistic activities in all post-Soviet nations. Renewed interest in the occult and the rising tide of secularism play their disturbing role to some extent.

There are also inner obstacles, like resistance to change. A ‘ghetto syndrome’ prevails in some churches. Church buildings are not used sufficiently – only two or three times a week. Younger people would like to use traditional church buildings not only for prayer but also for other meetings.

The indigenous missionaries effectively use contemporary opportunities for evangelism and church planting. They endorse a personal approach in evangelism and want to avoid ‘church jargon’. They have a pioneering spirit and make conscientious efforts.

**Increasing local involvement**

An important principle of IMP is that indigenous missionaries are selected by Baptist unions. The project is designed for five years, with outside support gradually decreasing, and local involvement increasing. Annual support of one church planter is approximately $4,200, but may vary from country to country.

The vision is to provide needed support for indigenous missionaries who are involved in the ministry of planting new Baptist churches. At the same time, support from local sources should increase proportionately. Eventually the indigenous missionaries/church planters are expected to be fully supported financially by local sources.

The process is not easy, especially in regions stricken by poverty. In spite of that, unions initiate nationwide annual collections of funds dedicated for missions and local sponsors are emerging.

From the beginning of the IMP, there has been a vision to support indigenous church plants that are able to reproduce. Desired multiplication is possible.

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through concentration of attention on those missionaries who have a vision of growth and are supported by local churches. This is the vision of regional mission centers that have spiritual influence on their vicinity.

The multiplication mission centers should provide training of leaders, strategy for growth, appropriate training materials, recommended models of activity, and local resources. Their role is to share the vision of multiplication and facilitate other churches in their regions by equipping them for evangelism, discipleship, leadership and church planting. Such centers should be located where nationwide mission coordinators are.

Multiplication centers should be able to organize church planting courses and create possibilities for new candidates to practice. Urban locations for such centers are recommended because they provide larger nets for evangelism and numerous opportunities to teach. Besides, they can train leaders among students and professionals. Rural locations, however, are not disqualified. The multiplication process should happen naturally. The goal for reproducing churches is to give birth to daughter churches in the neighboring areas.

Daniel Trusiewicz is Mission Coordinator for the European Baptist Federation

The goal – Baptists making Christ known among the diverse nations, languages and cultures of Europe and the Middle East.

Two years are enough to find people to plant a church in Moldova or Ukraine, but the process of discipling requires much more time, a minimum of five to seven years . . . before a newly planted church becomes self-supportive.
When Hurricane Katrina hit the US Gulf Coast on August 30, 2005, the country experienced tsunami-type repercussions, not unlike what took place in South Asia and parts of East Africa just months earlier, in December 2004. Much has happened in the near twelve months since the devastation, but the region, and the country as a whole, has not been the same since.

Granted, Katrina was not on the psychological scale of 9/11, the euphemistic term used to describe the incredible attack on US sovereignty on September 11, 2001. But the emotions, at least those in the affected areas, have not been less intense. Anger has mixed with rage and dismay as the country grapples with a sense of inadequacy it never knew before. Suddenly, there was a renewed sense of vulnerability, confirming only what took place during 9/11. There is now pause, even fear, with the possibility of an Asian flu epidemic reaching the shores of the world’s most powerful country or another Katrina-type disaster.

But in the midst of the greatest tragedies and horrendous catastrophes, heroes are born. Katrina, and a few weeks later, Hurricane Rita, had their own heroes. Katrina and Rita have tested the human spirit in its capacity to respond, be generous, and to rise above petty squabbles. Too many failed the test, but there were those who refused to indulge in sideshows, and were prepared to get the job done. Persons, from all walks of life and backgrounds, responded to the agonizing needs of the residents, mainly in Alabama, Mississippi, and especially New Orleans, Louisiana.

Baptists can be justly proud that, unlike others, they were not found wanting. From the outset, after the winds and driving rains died, Baptists from throughout the US, and across the world, responded. It was in meeting and overcoming the obstacles that many proved themselves truly faithful, and brave. While the challenges taxed their resolve, from difficulties with communication, as expressed by Virginia Baptist Mission Board’s Terry Raines; to uncertainties of the political realities on the ground, as shared by David Goatley of Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention; or the difficulty in finding mission partners in the chaos, as declared by Timothy Wood, of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship; as well as difficulty to locate facilities to house their response teams, described by Earl Trent Jr, of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; these Baptist groups stuck to the task.

Most were struck by the sheer scale of the disaster. It was unlike anything he has “seen anywhere in the world in all my travels,” said Goatley. “Some places showed no existence of life. No trees, no birds,” he said. The devastation to people and geography was amazing, said Raines.

And yet, they responded as they could: Feeding the dispossessed and hungry, providing bedding and clothing, (Continued next page)
the construction of shelters, and the adoption of families, all worth in the millions of dollars in both cash and kind. Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, provided funding to at least eight groups, including to the Mississippi Baptist Convention and the Louisiana Baptist Convention, in the heart of the chaos. But it is Progressive Baptist’s Trent who voiced a need that may yet still be unfulfilled. “People who have been dispossessed need time to talk. This is a great challenge and a great need – to be listened to. This is vastly under-reported.”

This statement is recognition of long term needs yet to be addressed, long after the camera lights are turned off and the spectacle gazers have gone home. Some groups are trying. Lott Carey Mission has entered into partnership with National Baptist Convention of America, National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, Baptist World Aid, as well as the African American Catholic Congregation, to form Resurrection Resource Centers, “to help survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita transition into the next phase of rebuilding their lives.” The centers will “assist evacuees in securing local, state and federal resources available to them. They will also provide pastoral support, counseling and encouragement as well as help victims find employment and temporary or permanent housing. Social work professionals and lawyers will also provide specialized services and comprehensive legal assistance to those in need.”

Others are continuing the work. PNBC has two master projects in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to build and renovate houses, some in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity. CBF is doing work in these and other areas in the summer. American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky have taken the extraordinary step of adopting Pass Christian, a small town of 7,500 in Mississippi, located 20 miles west of Biloxi on the Gulf Coast.

The longer term issues are daunting, and it has led PNBC to voice a series of ‘grave concerns’ on its website. “The delay by our Government to intervene on behalf of the poor, hurt and helpless is abhorrent,” they said. “We are equally concerned that the effects and consequences of poverty are not understood here in America; and as a result, poor people are seen and treated by sub-human standards.” And in a missive as blunt as they come, it referred to “The reality of the racial and class divide. We are gravely concerned and grieved that the events… clearly show that institutional racism still exists in America.” Missions Director Trent refused to back down from these
words. “We are not backing away from it,” he emphasized. “Race clearly played a part.”

It is here again, that Baptists may yet make a difference. Katrina exposed a side of the American underbelly not pleasing to look at. Baptists, perhaps, may take up the challenge to address the issues raised by the disaster.

Hurricane Katrina Evacuee Reunited with Child

MEMPHIS, TENN: While the Center for Missing and Exploited Children continues to report that all children separated from their parents during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have been located and returned to family members, there are still children missing. The Law Office of Florence M. Johnson, in conjunction with Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention, recently reunited a mother with her five-year-old son that was missing since Hurricane Katrina.

Delisha Smith, 23, a native of Kenner, Louisiana, has cerebral palsy and is a five-time gold medalist from the 1997 Winter Special Olympics. Smith has two young sons, Michael Leavings, Jr., 5, and Kelly Charles, 2. On the Saturday before Hurricane Katrina, Anthony Michael Leavings, Sr., told Smith he was going to take Michael to get a hair cut. As the weather worsened, Smith telephoned Leavings, Sr. who told her that he was keeping Michael. Smith thereafter lost telephone service and any way to contact Leavings, Sr. The roof was torn from her apartment during the storm. She managed to swim out of the apartment complex to safety, with her other son clinging to her side, and was eventually flown to Memphis, TN. She had not seen Michael since August 26, 2005.

Smith filed missing person reports with the Jefferson Parish Louisiana Police Department, The Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the Memphis Police Department to no avail. However, through the efforts of Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention and Attorneys Florence M. Johnson and Pamela Brown, Leavings, Sr. was tracked to Orange, Texas. Smith’s attorneys filed a petition in juvenile court in Memphis, Tennessee for the return of her son.

After many weeks of investigative work, Attorneys Johnson and Brown finally traced the boy to Orange, TX, where a Leavings family member had been posing as Michael’s mother. Houston law enforcement then took up the search for Michael and on May 5, 2006 he was located at an apartment complex in Houston. Immediately upon finding the child, law enforcement returned him to his mother.

Delisha Smith, who is currently living in Memphis, stated, “I am so grateful for the help of my attorneys and Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention, without them I would have never seen my son, Michael again. I hope other mothers and fathers that have children missing will not give up hope for their safe return,” said Smith.

All legal work on behalf of Smith is being done on a pro bono basis by Johnson and Brown. The Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention has provided funding for all expenses related to reuniting mother and child as part of their continuing work with Katrina and Rita evacuees. Smith was able to contact legal services after she attended a local Memphis church and heard of the resources Lott Carey and attorneys Johnson and Brown were able to provide.
Reports of inspiration, challenge, tragedy and praise, gathered from around the world, draw our diverse Baptist family closer together in the Baptist World Alliance.

BWA Honors Human Rights
Gustavo Parajon of Nicaragua Receives Human Rights Award

By Eron Henry

Gustavo Parajon, medical doctor, clergyman, and a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, is the 2006 recipient of the prestigious Baptist World Alliance Human Rights Award.

The award was previously handed out every five years but, following a vote at the BWA Centennial Congress held in Birmingham, England, in July of last year, it is now given annually. It is awarded in recognition of “significant and effective activities to secure, protect, restore or preserve human rights,” and will be given this year at the General Council/Annual Gathering of the BWA, held July 3 to 8 in Mexico City.

Parajon, a prominent figure in Nicaraguan evangelical and medical circles is being recognized for outstanding relief and development work, as well as his contribution to the evangelical movement and Baptist witness in his country.

He has founded two major organizations. PROVADENIC (Nicaragua Vaccination and community Development Program), founded in 1967, was started in partnership with the First Baptist Church of Cleveland in the United States, the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention and the First Baptist Church of Managua. It is a primary health care program that serves 25 rural communities by training local health promoters to treat and prevent common illnesses.

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

During the Sandinista Revolution and the war in the 1980s, CEPAD was the intermediary between the Evangelical Churches and the government, and won the admiration of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega who appointed Parajon as a member of the National Reconciliation Commission, together with Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, former Catholic Archbishop of Managua. This led to misrepresentation in some conservative circles that CEPAD was a communist organization working in tandem with the Soviet-backed government. As a result, CEPAD’s clinics became targets for attacks from Contra rebels, who sought to overthrow the government, placing doctors, nurses and patients at risk. An intervention by noted Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary professor and author, Ron Sider, who organized visits of prominent conservative leaders from the United States to the sites served by the organization, helped to dispel the erroneous accusation. CEPAD continues its outstanding ministry of reconciliation.

Parajon has received other awards, including the Sesquicentennial Medallion as an Outstanding Citizen of Managua during Managua’s 150th anniversary in 2002. He was also awarded the Dahlberg Peace Award by the American Baptist Churches in 1980, and a Doctor of Humane Letters degree by Denison University in 1981.

He is the fourth person to receive the BWA award. Previous recipients were former United States President Jimmy Carter in 1995, recognized for his promotion of peace and democracy worldwide; ‘Rev. Simon’ of Burma, principal of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School, in 2000, for his work among Cambodian refugees on the Thai border; and in 2005, Lauran Bethell of the United States, in recognition for her work with exploited women and children.
By Chris Hall


After fifteen years of service as General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), Coffey is stepping down to concentrate on being President of the Baptist World Alliance, a role he has held since the Baptist World Congress in Birmingham last year.

Coffey’s brother, Ian Coffey, a Baptist minister of Crossroads Church in Switzerland, flew in from Geneva to lead the tribute which included a short humorous film illustrating Coffey’s service to the Union. Delegates from Baptist churches across England and Wales were also able to write their personal tributes on a ‘prayer wall’ at the side of the stage. One wrote, “Thank you for never stopping being a pastor.”

On the first day of the Assembly, Jonathan Edwards, currently Team Leader of the South West Baptist Association was unanimously voted in as Coffey’s successor as General Secretary. In his acceptance speech he paid homage to Coffey. “David Coffey has been a wonderful servant of the Lord amongst us. To us as a Baptist family he has been a courageous, confident and winsome leader and we will always thank God for him. Personally, he has been a true friend and encourager, especially through the past nine years.”

Edwards went on to focus on his priorities when he becomes General Secretary this September. “Unless we are a denomination that is utterly committed to prayer we will go horrifically wrong. For only as we are on our knees, will we get to know our Savior better, and hear his agenda for our work together. The exciting fact is that every church is different – every church bears a unique testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our task is to give encouragement to local churches. The task ahead is huge and the challenges are many but as we turn our churches inside out, we will be able to proclaim the gospel powerfully to these islands.”

One of the challenges facing British Baptists is in children’s work. Over 30,000 children have left Baptist churches in the last two years. The Union is spearheading a national day of prayer and awareness in Baptist churches on June 11, 2006, called ‘On Our Knees,’ to highlight the issue. Nick Lear, one of the Union’s Mission Advisers, encouraged the Assembly saying that churches with a mission ethos in their children’s work were growing, and that “there is hope.”

Kate Coleman, who ministers at the Regeneration Centre in Birmingham, England, was inducted as BUGB President, the first black woman to hold the position. In her keynote address entitled, ‘Stay focused – presumptions, prejudices and power,’ Kate explored Peter’s recognition of the Gentiles as accepted by God (Acts 10). She challenged delegates to consider who their ‘gentiles’ were; those with whom they may avoid sharing the gospel and love of Christ. “Are they terrorists, are they those in civil partnerships, are they gang members, are they asylum

(Continued next page)
seekers, the homeless, child offenders?... Whenever we develop an attitude that will not engage with ‘Those People,’ then prejudice is close behind,” she said.

Krystaal, the Lwamba brothers originally from DR Congo, whose mix of gospel, hip hop and soul was so popular at last year’s Baptist World Congress, performed throughout the weekend. They were involved with Prism, interactive sessions which explored the same Bible passages being preached on in the main arena, using poetry, art, creative writing and music.

Former hostage in Iraq, Norman Kember, described his experiences in a special late evening interview. Welcomed by the Assembly, Kember responded saying, “My misfortune has resulted in many wonderful things. It was an opportunity for people to come together and discuss the true reality of Christian peacemaking.” His wife, Pat, expressed her gratitude to all those around the world who had prayed for Kember’s release.

The Baptist Assembly is also the annual gathering of BMS World Mission, founded in 1792 by William Carey. Delegates heard about work that the organization is doing with mission partners across the world, and mission personnel were commissioned to go out to countries including France, Peru and Afghanistan. The Asian Tsunami on December 26, 2004, brought an amazing response from British Baptists with BMS World Mission receiving £1.6 million (just under $3 million US) which has been spent on immediate relief and long-term redevelopment in the region.

David Kerrigan, Director for Mission at BMS World Mission, argued in his address to the Assembly that mission should be everything to Baptists, whether in the UK or worldwide. “A radical conversion to total mission will move us from a mindset that sees mission as a marginal preoccupation we devote some time to, to a full-time, life-long, all-or-nothing commitment.”

Chris Hall is a Writer and Editor with the Baptist Union of Great Britain

The Revd Dr Kate Coleman is BUGB President for 2006/7

Viacheslav Nesterchuk was elected president of the All-Ukraine Union of the Association of Evangelical Baptists (AUU AEB). This was at the union’s 25th Convention, held May 10 to 13, 2006. Nesterchuk previously held the post of vice president. Hryhorii Komendant, who served as president since 1990, was elected head of the newly-created Spiritual Advisory Council of the AUU AEB.

Other officers include Vice Presidents Stepan Kornuta, and Volodymyr Shemchyshyn. Valeriy Antoniuk was elected secretary.

An International Christian Conference on Prostitution “LIVING HOPE” was held at Green Lake Conference Center in Green Lake, Wisconsin, USA, April 22-27, 2006. There were 200 participants from 36 countries. The conference was offered by Green Lake Conference Center in partnership with Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department, International Ministries, and American Baptist Women’s Ministries. Leaders included representatives of the regional ministries from Europe, North American, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Dr. Dan Allender was the keynote speaker. He serves as president and professor of counseling at Mars Hill Graduate School near Seattle, Washington. The event was organized by Lauran Bethell, recipient of the Baptist World Alliance Human Rights Award in 2005.

The Union of Baptist Churches in Latvia elected a new bishop. Peteris Sprogis was elected in March and inaugurated on April 17.
By Victor Rembeth

An earthquake struck the Indonesian town of Yogyakarta on May 27, 2006. The following is a first hand account of the aftermath.

No one really ever expects to be placed in a disaster area. Early Saturday morning, May 27, my family had just started our day as usual when we were shocked by the quake. It was 5:55 a.m. during my family’s morning devotion when the house was shaken. We ran outside. We were scared and felt helpless. After almost two minutes, we were able to run away from our house and found out that our area was not heavily damaged.

We realized how bad the quake was when we took Amadea to school. There were many ambulances and all kinds of vehicles with victims and dead bodies. People were panicking. The quake damaged 90 percent of the south area of the city. We rushed as soon as possible to UKRIM University because of our concern for the students, especially for those from Nias who had suffered through the tsunami of December 2004. Most of the girls cried when they also remembered the trauma they had in their own land. We were distressed to find out that two dorms were badly damaged.

Dhani and I tried to help them. We found out that the quake was even worse than we had thought. Only two hours after the quake we went to the east, together with Maria from Indonesian Baptist Aid, who I had invited to lecture in Social Theology. We stopped at a Baptist Church in the Prambanan area and found that dead bodies were everywhere. More than 75 percent of the area was damaged by the quake. With the money that we had, we helped them to the extent that we could. Together with a local Baptist pastor, Rev. Aken, we went further east, and realized that the disaster was even worse in the Birin area of Klaten. The church there had fallen flat to the ground, and we brought food and water to the people who had not had anything to eat since the morning. We cried with them in front of the graveyard where they had just buried four of their relatives.

We tried to identify what was really needed. We all agreed that there was too much to do! Blankets, food, medicine, temporary shelters, etc. were all in great need. We were visiting different areas for more than eight hours and realized we had to go back to Yogya to decide what we needed to do to organize a relief team. Despite not having any food, all of us worked hard to contact Jakarta (the head office of REBANA/Indonesian Baptist Aid), as well as coordinating work with the local Baptist Association and pastors.

Early Sunday morning we went to two local churches in the city of Yogya, and found that they could not worship in their badly damaged sanctuary. I then conducted a meeting and we were blessed with a great number of people who were willing to be volunteers for up to two weeks. We organized a management structure, and the following day a medical team came from Surabaya and Lampung to help. Other teams of field workers came from Banyumas and Solo areas. The second day after the quake was busy, yet with the help of volunteers coming from different areas and levels, we were greatly helped. We finished our day at two o’clock in the morning and had identified the places that we will be involved in, in more serious ways.

The third and fourth days were the busiest times in coordinating our medical teams. People were coming from Singapore, Korea, the United States and Hungary to help. Praise the Lord! We were able to map out more places to help. We were even helped by many Muslim volunteers. It was a blessing to have them work with us as we were showing our love in this humanitarian effort.

On the fourth day, a team from REBANA/Indonesian Baptist Aid came with more people and more local volunteers became involved. We had workers both in the field and behind the management desk. We were able to distribute more help to the victims.

After that, we were able to coordinate better systems of relief management. We were able to network with several organizations. We worked with churches, Baptists and others. We also worked with Muslim groups, such as the Nahdlatul Ulama group (the largest Islamic group in Indonesia), the Islamic Student Movement, and the Youth of the Mosques. I felt blessed to speak in the mosque concerning Christian love. But more so I was blessed to be used as a channel of blessing to many who were in need. We also worked with the Hungarian Embassy. The Ambassador came with me to the disaster areas where they had sent their doctors.

After fifteen days had passed, I felt I needed to take a break from this stressful and demanding position as a Chief Field Officer, and handed the continuation of the work to the officers of REBANA/Indonesian Baptist Aid. I tried to do my best. UKRIM University was more than willing to let me take two weeks off from my activities and responsibilities. So many persons and groups have done their best to help the victims of Yogya and Central Java. I was blessed to have these great people around me, and encouraged them to remain involved in this huge humanitarian work.

The damage and ruins are everywhere, and the need for rehabilitation and rebuilding is massive. We still need to work hand in hand so that the Good News will always be there with the victims. I am reminded that people do not care how much we know, but they do know how much we care!

Again thanks to everyone for your great support and prayers.

Victor Rembeth works with Indonesia Baptist Aid as a project coordinator for the Yogyakarta earthquake and previously served as General Secretary of the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches and President of Asian Baptist Youth Fellowship. He now lectures at UKRIM University.
Indonesia

Earthquake Response – BWAid Treats the Injured

by Bela Szilagyi,
Hungarian Baptist Aid

Just one day after the earthquake in Indonesia, Baptist World Aid Rescue24 doctors and paramedics from Hungary performed operations and treated the injured in Yogyakarta and surrounding areas.

“Many of the injured may die if they do not receive professional medical care in time,” said Walid Abou Samra, Hungarian Baptist Aid surgeon. “The local hospital is crowded and the injured fill the nearby streets and squares. Infusions (intravenous drips) are hanging on the trees,” said Walid. The surgeon, who was working in Nias, Indonesia, on a BWAid project when the earthquake struck and was redirected to Yogyakarta, further explained, “There is a great need of further considerable medical help. There are a lot of injured who are waiting for amputation, cutting of wounds or other surgeries, but there are not enough anesthesiologists.”

Walid was one of three Hungarian and one Indonesian doctors working on a BWAid Medical Project in the island of Nias, Indonesia, that was hit by the tsunami and earthquake last year. All were immediately redeployed from Nias to Yogyakarta. By Sunday afternoon they were already at work treating and helping the victims of the earthquake, performing surgeries and operations.

The injured were marked with small plates given by local and international doctors according to how serious their injury and condition was. Based on this classification, surgeries and treatments were scheduled. A 5 year-old boy lay on the ground in great pain with broken shins with his wounds open wide. The locals told him it was not so urgent to treat his injury: “The worst case is that you become crippled.” Seeing this, Walid changed the boy’s plate when the locals were not looking.

The second BWAid Rescue24 Medical Team, consisting of six Hungarian doctors and paramedics, left Hungary on the day of the earthquake, Saturday, May 27. They took half a metric ton of equipment, medicines, and medical supplies for the medical work. They were joined by two Singaporean paramedics and worked together with local Indonesian Baptists. They arrived in Indonesia on Sunday and started to treat the injured on Monday morning. Their cooperation with Indonesian Baptist Aid and Indonesia Holistic Ministries was not only excellent but also very effective.

“Though the local authorities and Baptist brothers organize everything excellently, our doctors still have to work in quite adverse circumstances which the frequent rains make worse,” reported Laszlo Pavelcze, HBAid rescue commander. “Most of Yogyakarta is ruined, water and electricity provision is somewhat restored, and there seems to be no danger of infections.”

The local Baptist brothers – cooperating with the local authorities
– not only provided accommodation and the transportation for the equipment and medicines, but also surveyed the locations of the greatest need for medical assistance in the surrounding settlements. Based on this survey, some BWAid Rescue24 doctors worked in the Bethesda hospital in Yogyakarta, while others focused on six villages where no medical care was provided, for example in Bantu, where some victims died because they had not received medical care in the first hour.

“BWAid Rescue24 offered mass feeding, search and rescue, and medical assistance to the Indonesian government. So far they accepted the medical assistance, but we hope for mass feeding and other relief opportunities. The team will also assess needs and possible ways for Baptists to be involved in later stages of humanitarian relief and rehabilitation,” said Bela Szilagyi, HBAid director. “It seems at the moment that more doctors and medicines, food, tents, blankets are needed now.”

Doni Wijaya and Sonny Samosir of Indonesian Baptist Aid, a ministry of the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches, coordinated the response from Jakarta, and Maria Endang and Victor Rembeth from Yogyakarta. Ronny Welong and Indonesian Holistic Ministries field team distributed food in 14 villages. Twelve team members worked in Yogyakarta.

Anugrah Baptist Church was set up as an operation center and Prambanan Baptist Church as a medical clinic. Two Baptist medical teams from Surabaya and Kediri left for Yogyakarta on the Sunday following the earthquake.

BWAid is the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, and provided an initial grant of $40,000 toward the relief effort.

Right: Dr. Dezso Toth

Below left: Dr. Abu Samra Walid (on left) and Laszio Pavelcze (right)

Below right, left to right: Ferenc Varga, Laszio Ország, Dr. Dezso Toth, and Dr Melpa Sirait
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**BWA**

**Calendar of Events**

**General Council:**
- July 3-8, 2006: BWA General Council, Mexico City, Mexico
- July 2-7, 2007: BWA General Council, Accra, Ghana
- July 21-26, 2008: BWA General Council, Mediterranean Area
- July 6-11, 2009: BWA General Council, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- July 30-August 3, 2011: BWA General Council, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Living Water Conferences:**
- October 8-13, 2006: BWA Living Water Evangelism Conference, Nairobi, Kenya
- May 2-6, 2007: BWA Living Water Evangelism Conference, Thailand
- January 2008: BWA Living Water Evangelism Conference, USA
- Jan/Feb 2008: BWA Living Water Evangelism Conference, Kohima, India and Orissa, India

**Youth Conference:**
- July 30-August 3, 2008: Baptist Youth World Conference, Leipzig, Germany

**Baptist World Congress:**
- July 28- August 1, 2010: 20th Baptist World Congress, Honolulu, Hawaii

**Liberia**

**New Leadership**

Rev. J. Shelton Seidi, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Zwedru city, Grand Gedeh County, and Principal of the R. B. Richardson Elem to Senoir High Baptist School, is the new president of the Liberian Baptist convention. He is an outstanding and faithful leader and pastor among Liberian Baptist, respected and loved by everyone. Rev. Seidi was elected during the 92nd annual session of the Liberia Baptist Missionary & Educational Convention, Inc at Providence Baptist Church in Monrovia from April 26 – 30, 2006. The theme for this year’s session was ‘We are laborers together with God.’

**Caribbean**

**Publisher Celebrates Thirty Years of Ministry**

In 1972 the newly-formed Caribbean Baptist Fellowship took a decision to study the feasibility of producing Caribbean-oriented Sunday School literature. At that time, the only materials available to Caribbean churches were produced in the USA or Great Britain.

In January 1976, a trial issue of Sunday School lessons under the Caribbean Bible Lessons label was produced in Jamaica. In October of that year, regular quarterly distribution began. Subsequently, the literature committee of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship took the name Caribbean Christian Publications (CCP). Currently, CCP distributes about 51,000 guides three times a year to churches of about 30 denominations in 27 countries of the Caribbean region.

Over the thirty years, despite challenges such as financial constraints, inadequate staffing and the daily struggles of maintaining the work, CCP has been able to meet its production deadlines and financial obligations.

**Jamaica**

**Baptist Elected Ecumenical Leader**

Rev. Karl Johnson, General Secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union, was elected President of the Jamaica Council of Churches, the largest and most prominent ecumenical body in the country, consisting mainly of older, mainline churches. Johnson succeeds Rev. Philip Robinson, a Methodist, and follows on the footsteps of other Baptists who have served as President of the JCC, Rev. Roy Henry and Rev. C. Sam Reid, a former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance. Johnson is also chairman of the board of governors of the United Theological College of the West Indies, the largest theological seminary in the English-Speaking Caribbean.

**Sri Lanka**

**Tsunami Support**

Baptist World Aid has worked with the Sri Lanka Baptist Union in a joint project to build houses for tsunami victims. All 72 planned houses were in progress with 39 completed. Construction of a community center was underway. Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has cooperated in the venture.
The congregation sat in rapt silence as the actor approached the church baptistery. Suddenly the young man leapt into the baptistery and began splashing and playing in the streams of water flowing down 30 feet from the ceiling into the baptistery—a powerful visual reminder of the refreshment, cleansing and joy that is found in Christ the Living Water.

Over 600 delegates, representing almost every nation in Latin America, gathered in late April for the Living Water Conference emphasizing leadership and evangelism held at the First Baptist Church of Curitiba, Brazil. The evening services attracted over 3,000 worshippers. The conference, part of the Baptist World Alliance’s five year ‘Christ the Living Water’ strategy, was conducted in concert with UBLA (the BWA’s regional body for Latin America).

A host of speakers from Latin America and other regions, as well as several BWA leaders including General Secretary, Denton Lotz, and Living Water Coordinator, Tony Cupit, preached in the evening worship services. Fausto Vasconcelos, new Director of Evangelism and Education, provided translation. Great response to the preaching was evident. One evening, about 50 people responded to a challenge to commit themselves to active ministry and mission following a message on the words of Jesus, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Focus groups and workshops stressed the vital nature of sharing faith in Jesus Christ and of servant leadership as exemplified in the life and death of Jesus Christ. A few of the topics included, ‘Planting new churches,’ ‘Young people and the new missionary movement,’ ‘The leadership example of Jesus,’ and ‘Living Water and theological education.’

Many creative elements were incorporated in the conference to highlight the theme, ‘Christ the Living Water,’ such as the use of water imagery and mini-fountains. A talented drama team challenged the delegates with evocative and powerful scenes from daily life as an introduction to each night’s theme. As a part of the Lord’s Supper, a foot-washing ceremony was held with BWA leaders kneeling and washing the feet of representative people in society including a lame girl, an elderly woman, a blind boy and a child. At the concluding ceremony of the conference, a dozen brightly dressed men and women rappelled from roof to stage on 50 foot long ropes as the congregation sang, “As the living water flows in us, as the living water flows again…”

A newly published resource, Christ the Living Water, was introduced at the conference and will be used at subsequent Living Water Conferences. This book, containing four articles in English, Spanish and Portuguese, deals with the Living Water objectives to enlist and equip Baptists to share faith in Jesus Christ and to do so as humble servants of Christ who was the perfect servant-leader.

In addition to the emphasis on Christ as spiritual water, the conference offered
opportunities for Baptists to be involved in the ministry of providing physical water to people in need. Baptist World Aid funded several projects carried out in Curitiba by over 70 local Baptist volunteers throughout the month of April. Teams taught people about water purification and provided purification kits, installed septic latrines, distributed glasses emblazoned with the ‘Christ the Living Water’ logo, and held conferences on water economy and hygienic care. The Living Water Conference challenged Baptists in Latin America to be faithful in the area of evangelism and strengthened leaders to accomplish the task of sharing the Gospel. For worldwide Baptists, the BWA’s ‘Christ the Living Water’ strategy can be a defining emphasis in our mission as we witness for Christ in the 21st century. Sometimes our lands have been “dry and thirsty” as we have ignored the Biblical call to come and drink of water that will sustain and rejuvenate us and empower us to share the Living Water with others.

One of the seven wonders of the modern world is the Itaipu Dam close to Curitiba where the Living Water Conference was held. This massive dam provides almost all the power needs of Paraguay and 25 percent of Brazil’s total energy. To see the effect of the mighty Parana River harnessed to provide such power is a metaphor for the BWA’s Living Water Conferences. These conferences have the potential to harness and unleash energy, fueled by the Holy Spirit, to enable Baptist believers to go forth with the inspiration and the dynamic, creative force that Christ the Living Water offers to a thirsty world.

Cameroon
Cameroonians Unite

In what he hailed as the fulfillment of “the joy of Christ’s prayer in John – ‘that they might all be one so that the world might believe,’” Baptist World Alliance General Secretary, Denton Lotz, congratulated Baptist groups in Cameroon on the formation of the Cameroon Baptist Alliance (CBA).

The alliance consists of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), Native Baptist Church (EBC) and the Union of Baptists Churches of Cameroon (UEBC).

Baptist work in Cameroon was pioneered by Jamaican missionaries. Mammie Johnson, born a slave but freed after Emancipation in 1838, was one of several Jamaicans who traveled to the island of Fernando Po in 1843 and settled along the Cameroon River in Douala in 1845. Baptized by British Baptist Missionary Society missionary Alfred Saker in 1853, she and husband Sam Johnson opened a mission station in Douala where they, along with another Jamaican missionary, Joseph Jackson Fuller, helped lay the foundation for Baptist witness in the country. According to respected church historian, Horace Russell, “They studied the native languages, undertook translation work, formed churches, and provided services in the areas of medicine, education, agriculture, and industrial training.” He noted that, “As part of the Jamaican pastoral team, [Mammie] Johnson pioneered women’s work and encouraged formation of indigenous church leadership in Cameroon.”

A Baptist World Alliance Heritage and Identity Commission study reported, “The Baptist Missionary Society of London with Baptists from Jamaica established in 1843 a beachhead on the island of Fernando Po, which, however, the Spanish terminated in 1858. In 1845 one of the Jamaicans, Joseph Merrick, settled on the mainland in West Cameroon and began translation work. In the same year, Alfred Saker, one of the British missionaries, began to minister in East Cameroon and formed four years later the first Baptist church in Cameroon.”

Conflicts and division led to the formation of several Baptist groups. The Heritage and Identity Commission study further noted, “Due to the occupation of the territory by Germany and later occupations by Great Britain and France, German Baptists from Germany and the USA and the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society assumed responsibility” for some of these groups. “Some native Baptists refused cooperation with any mission society and formed their own independent native churches.”

The formation of the CBA is a coming together of the Baptist family after a long period of estrangement. “We came to an agreement that as Baptists, we must have one body to evangelize Cameroon, [and] bring forth educational and medical healing to our people,” declared new General Secretary, Charles Tangwa, at the launch. The unity between the three bodies was initiated because “in Christ there is no east or west. As we have been called out to proclaim the gospel, it is a God-given responsibility that we are called to that commission. I am asking all the Baptists to become committed to that course and we all join our hands to work together for the good of the gospel,” Tangwa said. The constitution declares the alliance’s objective to “build an organization of Baptist churches and provide a space for sharing in witness and ministry.”

Despite the unity, “the CBA recognizes the autonomy of each of the member bodies.” There will, however, be cooperation in mission and program activities that include evangelism, education and training, health service, communication, mutual assistance, and socio-economic activities. Emmanuel Mbangue Eboa of the UEBC is the new president, while Tangwa of CBC was elected general secretary. Other offices filled were those of vice president, general treasurer, and vice general secretary. The Executive Council consists of the executive committee of the CBA, and six representatives from each of the three member bodies. A General Assembly will be held once per year while the Executive Council will meet biannually.

Lotz, in his congratulatory letter to the CBA, expressed the hope that God will bless the alliance and that the “unity will be a great witness to the people of Cameroon.”

The CBA has a combined total of 1430 churches with almost one hundred and fifty thousand members.
“As Christians we must seek personal holiness and at the same time work for social holiness,” Denton Lotz, Baptist World Alliance General Secretary, challenged the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany at their annual assembly held this year in Krelingen, Germany.

The assembly, attended by 1,100 delegates and visitors, centered on the theme of German Baptists’ mission campaign, ‘Living evangelistically – hearing and doing.’ In previous years this campaign has emphasized church growth and evangelism. The concluding aspect of the campaign, and the focus of this year’s assembly, was social justice and the responsibility of the Church in today’s world. As German Baptist General Secretary, Regina Claas, explained, “We need to move further into the challenges of our surroundings with unemployment rising, pensions declining, public health care breaking down, family systems deteriorating, and poverty on the rise. What is our calling as the Church to be Christ’s witnesses in such a world?”

The speakers throughout the assembly addressed this significant question. Lotz told the delegates, “The prophets remind us that worship services that do not issue into action are nothing. Is that not a warning to the Church today – all your beautiful feelings do not mean anything if you do not obey? Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this prophetic protest. He is the one who feeds the hungry, gives water to the thirsty and preaches good news to the poor. Following Christ means that the Church of Jesus Christ must become the extension of the incarnation.”

Siegfried Grossmann, president of the union, stressed the idea that justice should go beyond the local congregation. Christians should also be concerned about whether “our regional, national and global lifestyles are just or unjust.”

Claas, who also serves as chair of BWA’s Freedom and Justice Commission, spoke about ways Baptists are involved in social action such as ‘A Chance for Life,’ a program for women in crisis pregnancies, the Baptist network against human trafficking, and the ‘Micah Challenge’ which aims to eliminate poverty. Claas discussed German Baptists’ response to the current situation in the ‘Colonia Dignidad’ in Chile, a colony founded in 1961 by the German deacon, Paul Schaefer, who is now in prison because of his abuse of his followers. A good majority of the German colony’s 200 residents are former Baptists. Claas expressed German Baptists’ responsibility and desire to assist the colony members as they seek a new life in Chile or Germany.

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German Baptists recognized the modest growth of the union over the past year, an increase of .2 percent, bringing the membership to 85,194.

Friedrich Schneider, Director of Church Development, said, “We’re happy about this trend, for other churches and public organizations are frequently struggling with falling membership.” While church attendance rates are high – 98.1 percent of German Baptist members attend church on Sunday – German Baptists aim to achieve 100 percent attendance.

The assembly was a moving experience for those who attended as they witnessed the renewed strength of a union that has recently undergone crisis. Four years ago, the president, the vice president and the general secretary of the union all resigned. There was also conflict over the indebtedness that had been caused by the move to the Elstal seminary campus. Lotz explained, “It was with mixed feelings that many came to Krelingen. These feelings were dissipated, however, by the unity that was...
experienced during the assembly. Claas has shown great leadership as General Secretary during these past years and the German Baptists are again on good financial footing. There is a new sense of unity and purpose.”

Lotz expressed his appreciation for the German Baptists and for their role in the worldwide Baptist body: “We pray God’s blessings upon German Baptists since they are a very important member of the Baptist World Alliance. Their work in Eastern Europe after the fall of the wall was significant in that they have contributed more than 13 million dollars to help Eastern Europe and they continue to do so.”

Several major decisions were made at the assembly. The union voted to relinquish its share of the ownership of the Oncken-Verlag publishing house in Kassel. German Baptists also decided to sell a third of the Elstal campus in order to satisfy the union’s debt. New leadership was installed. Volcker Spannenberg was chosen as the new director of the Elstal seminary since former director, Stefan Stiegler, had moved to Hamburg to be the leader of diaconal work there.

Another aspect of the assembly was the invitation to all German Baptist young people to attend the Baptist Youth World Conference that will be held in Leipzig, Germany, July 30 – August 3, 2008.

The Jamaica Baptist Union has intensified its fellowship and working relationship with Baptists in North America by entering into a historic 20-year partnership with the Board of International Ministries (IM) of the American Baptist Churches.

A Mission Covenant endorsing the new joint-venture was signed during the recent 156th General Assembly of the JBU. Signatories to the agreement were Rev. Raul Ruiz, IM Area Director for the Caribbean, Mexico, Spain and Portugal and Rev. Glenroy Lalor, Secretary of the JBU Mission Agency. The later agency will be the focal point of contact between the two groups.

The agreement aims to mobilize Baptists in the island and the US, in bold initiatives in mission. “The priorities of this mission agreement include equipping leaders, exploring the Christ-like mission, Mission Education, Urban Mission, Evangelism and Discipleship,” outlines Rev. Karl Johnson, JBU General Secretary.

Overwhelming emphasis will be placed on the dynamics of Urban Mission. The JBU and IM will share resources in the development and training of urban specialists in the evangelizing of cities, townships and other urban enclaves.

**In Memoriam**

**Those who passed on . . .**

**Rodney Gordon**

The President of the Baptist Association of Belize Rev. Rodney Gordon passed away on March 17 in Belize City. He suffered a severe heart attack while sleeping. A memorial service was held at Queen Street Baptist Church in Belize City and the funeral at his home church in Independence Village. He is survived by wife Diana and the rest of the family as they mourn the passing of their husband, father and grandfather.

**Franjo Klem**

Franjo Klem, former General Secretary of the Baptist Union in Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1949 and 1955 to 1973, died at age 90. He was one of the most important Baptist leaders in Yugoslavia during the Communist regime and was active within the European Baptist Federation and the worldwide family of Baptists. Judson Press published his book ‘Persecuted but not forsaken: the story of church behind the Iron Curtain’ under the pen name “Pastor Nicoli”. At that time it was dangerous to publish in his real name. His funeral service was held Wednesday, May 17, in Germany.

**Rode Dubelzars**

Rode Dubelzars passed away in her sleep on April 5 at the age of 94. Dubelzars, a Latvian immigrant to the United States, was a faithful member of the staff of the BWA Finance Department from the 1950s through the 1970s. Her great love throughout her life was the work of Christ’s church throughout the world through the Baptist tradition. She was committed to mission and to her homeland which she did not see for 50 years. She was a devoted follower of Christ who studied and prayed every day. Dubelzars’ funeral was held on April 15 at her church, Bucks County Latvian Baptist Church, in Applebachsville, Pennsylvania.

**Grace Widjaja**

Grace Widjaja, treasurer for the Asian Baptist Women Union from 1999 to 2004, and for the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches between 1990 and 2000, went home with her Lord on Monday, May 1, at her house in Jakarta. She died in her sleep. The funeral service was held May 4 at the Cengkareng Indah Baptist Church.
I was wending my way through a crowded street in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) Vietnam when someone nudged my arm. It was a mother with a young child and they were pointing to my can of coke. I finished the drink and handed it to them. They walked away and after a few yards the mother put the can on the street, crushed and flattened it with her heel and then placed it in a canvas bag held by the child. This is the face of poverty in Vietnam where the poorest survive on less than 50 cents a day.

Another face of Vietnam is one of economic prosperity with a growth rate of over 7% per year, and a burgeoning tourist industry lured by the sugar white beaches and the overwhelming beauty of locations such as Phu Quoc Island. This economic renaissance originated with a decision in 1986, when the ruling Communist party introduced doi moi, Vietnam’s equivalent of perestroika, which meant the country was committed to a free market economy, even while maintaining the party’s absolute monopoly on political power. During recent years Vietnam has moved from being a rice importer to the world’s third largest exporter of rice after India and Thailand.

As a further sign of its prosperity, check the label on the garment you are wearing and see if it says ‘Made in Vietnam.’

The BWA Human Rights delegation was in Vietnam to review the face of religious liberty in the 21st century. As the government of Vietnam seeks to consolidate its position in the international community with membership of the World Trade Organization in the pipeline, western democracies are still holding the Vietnamese government accountable for its religious freedom obligations under international law. Five East Asian nations have been named in the 2006 list of ‘countries of particular concern’ (CPCs) for their violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief. Myanmar, North Korea, China, Indonesia and Vietnam are all named as CPCs because their governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic violations of religious liberty.

The visit of the BWA delegation was historic, not least because this was the first time that an international delegation of Baptists, and a representative group of all Vietnamese Baptists, had been able to present to the government their concerns for legal recognition of their churches and organizations. Prior to the visit of the delegation, not even all Vietnamese Baptist leaders knew that there were five organized groups of Baptists in Vietnam. It is hoped that BWA Asian Secretary, Bonny Resu, will be able to arrange further talks with these five representative groups in Chiang Mai, Thailand, at next year’s Asian Baptist Federation meeting.

Whilst respect for religious freedom has improved in Vietnam since the new law, Ordinance on Religion and Belief, went into effect in November 2004 and the Prime Minister’s Instruction on Protestantism in February 2005, there are concerns that the authorities need to clarify the ambiguities and loopholes of the new laws. There is a need to guarantee that local party and security officials will be educated and held accountable to the new legislation on religious activity.

The BWA delegation learnt the meaning of an ancient Vietnamese proverb: ‘The law of the village supersedes the law of the King.’ The Prime Minister of Vietnam might issue a law encouraging tolerance and liberty for Protestant believers, but in rural areas where village heads lose authority when Christians turn to church deacons for leadership, the unity of the village community (highly prized in Vietnam) can be undermined by a house meeting of Baptist Christians.

Within the Protestant Christian community the most severe repression of religious activity is experienced by the ethnic minority groups, such as the Hmong people who inhabit some of the areas in northern Vietnam, where religious freedom is most severely restricted.

During our time in Vietnam, the BWA delegation consistently emphasized in our talks with government representatives that we were pressing for a religious liberty that was transparently without any restrictions. We appealed for the right to worship freely; to build churches; to open seminaries; to freely share the faith and to organize mercy ministries through the local church.

In making this appeal we were standing with persecuted Christians who witness courageously that Christ alone has the right to rule his Church, and no human being can usurp that right.

Baptists call this the crown rights of the Redeemer.
Explore the Depths Together

“...a life changing event”

“The last conference was excellent and we hope to return as a force in 2008!!!”
— Trevor Garhardt, England

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“The most incredible experience of my life!”
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