Focus on Global Impact Churches • see pages 16 – 23

Baptist World
A MAGAZINE OF THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE
Your Network to the World!

Baptists Construct Houses for Hurricane Victims
The month of May saw two major disasters on the Asian continent. On May 2 and 3, Cyclone Nargis caused widespread damage in Myanmar from winds, rain and high waves, leading to the deaths of an estimated 134,000 people and the displacement of millions more. The country’s food supply was virtually wiped out.

On May 12, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan province in China, causing massive landslides, collapsing buildings, killing tens of thousands and leaving millions more homeless.

Baptists, as has been the case in other major disasters, responded quickly and liberally. Two articles in this issue highlight the Baptist response.

Gifts came from individuals, churches, and conventions and unions around the world. A family in India donated more than half its income for the month of May to the BWA to aid the victims in Myanmar. The donation of US$600 was a most precious gift as it represented sacrifice on the part of that family.

Photo: BWA

What One Church Can Do

The Kowloon International Baptist Church in Hong Kong did a remarkable thing. The 600-member congregation gave an amount representing 41 percent of its annual budget to Myanmar and China. After making a special appeal to its members, mainly Asians with less than 10 percent expatriates, the Hong Kong church collected and sent US$258,377 to the Hong Kong Baptist Convention, a member body of the BWA whose General Secretary, Wood-Ping Chu, is a BWA vice president. This amount is to be passed on to the China relief work of the Sichuan Christian Council on the Chinese mainland.

Kowloon International also sent US$73,233.07 to Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, to be used for Myanmar relief.

After explaining the process of how the gifts came about, Harry Lucenay, pastor of the church and a member of the BWA Mission and Evangelism Workgroup, said, “Enough about us. God is good and we believe in what BWA is doing. We want to be a part of your work in Myanmar.”
**BWA OFFICERS**

David Coffey ...................................................... President  
Neville Callam .................................................. General Secretary

**BWA EXECUTIVE STAFF**

Patsy Davis ........................................................... Women  
Emmett Dunn ...................................................... Youth and Congress  
Eron Henry ........................................................ Communications  
Paul Montacute .................................................... BW Aid  
Alan Stanford ...................................................... Advancement  
Ellen Teague ........................................................ Finance/Administration  
Kathe Traynham ................................................... Promotion and Development  
Fausto Vasconcelos .............................................. Evangelism/Research

**BWA REGIONAL SECRETARIES**

Harrison Olan’g (Acting) .... All Africa Baptist Fellowship  
Tony Peck ......................................................... European Baptist Federation  
Peter Pinder ...................................................... Caribbean Baptist Fellowship  
Alberto Prokopchuk ......... Union of Baptists in Latin America  
P. Bonny Resu ................................................... Asian Baptist Federation  
Alan Stanford .................... North American Baptist Fellowship

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**26 Book Note**

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Michael Parsons and David Cohen, Eds.

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Reunification of the Baptist conventions in the Sudan – a church divided and dispersed by war – is an occasion for “jubilation and praise to God for his goodness” according to Ramadan Chan, SIC General Secretary.

**28 Callam Visits New Zealand and Australia**

The General Secretary visits the diverse, growing, mission centered associations of Baptist churches in Australasia, meeting with Baptist and state leaders, as well as students and educators.

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**13 Baptist Churches Construct Houses for Hurricane Victims**

Almost three years after Hurricane Rita, Louisiana is still recovering. In partnership with Habitat for Humanity, the BWA sponsored a four week “Blitz Build” this spring. Baptists from around the U.S. and Canada put “God’s love into action” and built six homes for families devastated by the storm.

**16 BWA Global Impact Churches**

Global Impact Churches are vital supporters of the Baptist World Alliance. Read the profiles of some of these congregations from around the world.

**24 Latin American Leaders Meet**

Leaders from the Baptist conventions and unions in 19 countries throughout Central and South America met – a first-time summit for the group – to get to know and understand each other, and to support one another’s ministries. One of the BWA’s goals is to “bring scattered Baptists together.”

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**28 Callam Visits New Zealand and Australia**

The General Secretary visits the diverse, growing, mission centered associations of Baptist churches in Australasia, meeting with Baptist and state leaders, as well as students and educators.

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**30 In Memoriam**
In Western Europe, beginning in the second decade of the twentieth century, attempts to address the problem failed. Concern for a fixed date for Easter overlooked the significance of the link between creation and redemption that a movable date ensures. Later, efforts by the United Nations never gained widespread support because the call for a fixed date was predicated on secular, commercial considerations, rather than on theological convictions. Nor did the discussion in the Second Vatican Council inspire an agreement among the churches around a common date for the celebration of Easter.

For the past eleven years, we have had what is perhaps the best proposal ever developed. The Middle East Council of Churches, together with the World Council of Churches, developed a proposal that arises from a profound concern. The proposal rests on the view that our differently dated celebrations of the same Christian festival reflect our churches’ divided witness to the apostolic faith and compromises the Christian church’s credibility and effectiveness in declaring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

The recommendation is that the churches agree a common date for Easter on the following bases:

1. Maintaining the norm agreed at the Council of Nicaea. Easter should be calculated to fall on the Sunday following the first vernal full moon, thereby preserving the link between Easter and the Jewish Passover and also preserving the cosmic dimension of Easter celebration.

2. Calculating the astronomical data using the most accurate possible scientific means available. Of course, experts in astronomy have already provided these calculations.

3. Using the meridian of Jerusalem, the place of Jesus’ death and resurrection, as the point of reference for the calculation of the full moon following the March equinox.

How have our churches responded to this proposal? Were we not relieved when, in 2001 and 2007, both in the East and in the West, whether we use the Julian or the Gregorian calendar, the dates for the celebration of Easter coincided? And do we not look forward to the same joy in 2010 and 2011? But this is not enough! We should not have to wait until 2014 and 2017 for the dates to coincide again. We could overcome the obstacle to our witness posed by the way we calculate the date of our major festal celebration if we viewed with sufficient concern the problems posed by the current situation. And we can unite to deal with it!

Do you care about the witness to our faith caused by separate dates of the celebration of major Christian festivals? What is your church’s attitude to this matter and what are you doing about it? What would God have us do?
Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey has been named to the Advisory Council of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

Former British Prime Minister Blair, in his May 2 invitation letter to Coffey, said, “Given your extensive knowledge and experience, I would count it a great honor and privilege if you were willing to accept an invitation to become a council member.”

Coffey, in accepting the invitation, stated, “I pledge my support for the Tony Blair Faith Foundation because I share the vision of fostering respectful relations between the historic faith traditions of the world. It is of vital importance for the peace of the nations that the faith traditions learn how to live with their deepest differences.”

Blair declared that “the aim of the foundation is to help promote respect, friendship, and understanding between major religious faiths, and to make the case for faith itself as relevant, positive, and a force for good in the modern world.”

Coffey’s appointment is for three years, and he will be joined by other Christian leaders, such as Baptist pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in California. The advisory council of the foundation, which was launched in New York on May 30, also has members from other faith traditions, including Judaism and Islam.

Coffey, who is BWA president from 2005-2010, previously served as General Secretary for the Baptist Union of Great Britain for 15 years, as Moderator of Free Churches, a Protestant and Evangelical grouping, and was one of the four presidents of the ecumenical group, Churches Together in England.

Earlier this year, he was honored by Queen Elizabeth II with the Order of the British Empire for his services to interfaith relations.

Christians in the eastern state of Orissa in India continue to suffer the effects of violence that broke out during Christmas 2007 and continued into mid-January of this year.

Kabi Gangmei of the Asia/Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF), one of six continental unions of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), reported to the BWA that “threats and intimidation still continue in many villages where Christians are a minority.” He said that there is still “fear of physical harm,” and that affected families are still suffering from mental depression due to loss of properties and houses.”

Even though the government has voted to compensate those who suffer violence should be compensated, this is being delayed “due to indifference of the bureaucrats” and there is “artificial scarcity of construction materials mainly from the traders.”

Furthermore, Christians are being denied “access to basic needs such as drinking water in some villages” as well as employment. Children from Christian homes in villages where Christians are a minority are denied schooling. “There appears to be a systematic process of suppression by the majority,” said Gangmei, who has special responsibility for aid and relief with the APBF.

Much of the violence took place in villages in the Kandhamal district of Orissa state. The All India Christian Council reported that 95 churches were burned or vandalized and 700 Christian homes were destroyed. Thousands of Christians fled the violence and hid in other villages and in the forests.

A significant number of the Christians in Orissa are Baptists, numbering approximately 500,000 in about 3,500 churches among several conventions and unions.

Baptists throughout India and elsewhere have responded by offering aid to the victims of the violence in Orissa. Thus far, 359 families, or approximately 1,500 persons in 23 villages, have received assistance. The relief was conducted by APBF in collaboration with two Baptist groups, the Bengal Orissa Bihar Baptist Association (BOBBCA) and the Kandhamal Baptist Churches Union. Relief grants came from Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, American Baptist Churches USA, BOBBCA, and others.

Assistance was mainly in the form of food, such as rice and lentils, and other basic needs, but Gangmei stated that there is need for shelter. “Many families still live in temporary camps set up by the government and by some individuals and organizations” but “the people living in the relief camps face serious health problems in the coming days due to the hot climate in Orissa” as there are “unhygienic conditions in the camps.”

Above left: Groceries provided by Baptists to victims of violence in Orissa state

Below: A victim of the violence in Orissa with supplies provided by Baptists
The government of Jordan has designated a plot of land for the Baptist World Alliance (BWA).

The offer was first made during a visit by BWA President David Coffey with Jordan’s King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein last September. The land is closely approximate to the region known as Bethany beyond Jordan, where it is believed that John the Baptist baptized Jesus Christ.

The BWA Executive Committee considered the offer at its meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii, in early March, and decided “to proceed with feasibility conversations with the Jordan Government.”

An agreement was reached between Coffey, who visited the site on May 26, and Jordan’s Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammed, chairperson of the Board of Trustees for the baptismal site, that the location will be used for the construction of a Baptism Center to be dedicated and opened in the spring of 2009.

A large plaque is to be placed at the entrance to the center with the inscription: “The Commission of the Site of the Baptism of Jesus Christ welcomes here in particular foreign visiting pilgrims from the member churches of the Baptist World Alliance.”

“I know that many Baptist and other Evangelical Christians will visit the site as pilgrims and some will choose to confess their faith in Jesus Christ in the waters of baptism,” Coffey said. “This is an act of appreciation for Christian presence in the region.”

Costa, who is executive director for the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development, declared that “Baptists of the Middle East are grateful for His Majesty’s invaluable gesture, and we welcome worldwide Baptist pilgrims to come and experience Middle Eastern hospitality!”

The Baptism Center will be located on the bank of the River Jordan and will take its place alongside other church buildings being constructed on the site.

An outbreak of fighting in the country of Lebanon led to the temporary closure of the Beirut Baptist School (BBS).

The school, founded in 1956, and run by the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD), a Baptist organization, was closed on Thursday, May 8, after fighting broke out between government forces and Hezbollah, the major Islamic movement in Lebanon.

More than 90 percent of the approximately 1,200 students at BBS are Muslims, attracted to the institution due to its reputation for delivering high quality education.

The Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), also run by LSESD, which began in 1960, had to postpone a public lecture on “The Missional Church,” scheduled for Monday, May 12, because of the violence. In addition to the school and seminary, LSESD also operates Dar Manhal Al Hayat, a publishing house that develops Arabic Christian and educational resources.

Nabil Costa, executive director of LSESD, who was out of the country when the fighting broke out, but who travelled safely by road back into Lebanon, requests prayer. “Please pray for wisdom for all relevant decision-makers . . . . Pray for sincerity in their endeavors. Pray as well for the Lord’s protection on the people, and His intervention that this country may be able to move forward and thrive in its role as (a) center for Christian ministry and a gateway to the Arab world.”

Lebanon has had a series of conflicts and violent clashes in recent times. In the summer of 2006, a month long war
The children shouted, “Asante, Kujeni Tena,” which means, “Thank you and come again.”
Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, has had a long association with Brotherhood of Compassion (BOC), an affiliate of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (RUECB), the largest Protestant church body in the world’s geographically largest country.

The BWAid-BOC association began in 1991 when BWAid, in response to a growing concern about hunger in the former communist country, sent a DC 10 airplane filled with food supplies to Moscow.

In mid-May, BWAid Director Paul Montacute attended the 20th anniversary celebration of Compassion Ministries, as BOC is sometimes called, which was founded in 1988 by Mikhail Zhidkov of the RUECB.

Over the years, the BWA has been involved in various ministry endeavors through RUECB and Compassion Ministries, including a substantial contribution to the construction of the current headquarters building of the Baptist union.

Both BWAid and the Mennonite Central Committee collaborated in the translation of Barclays New Testament Commentary into Russian, a project completed in 1995. The commentaries have been used by Russian-speaking churches in and out of Russia.

One major focus of Compassion Ministries is its ministry to children in need, in particular children infected by HIV/AIDS, and those suffering from tuberculosis. BWAid has been an important supporter of the HIV/AIDS program and the TB sanatorium in Moscow, providing medicines, physiotherapy equipment, clothes, toys, and school supplies.

A British team visited Jamaica from May 22-29 to deliver a slavery apology to the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU).

The Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) met in Swanwick, England, on November 12-14, 2007, and passed a resolution of apology “to God and to our brothers and sisters” for “the hurt we have caused, the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past, our unwillingness to listen to the pain of our black sisters and brothers, and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today.”

Millions of Africans were kidnapped and brought to the Americas, including to Jamaica, to work on plantations owned by British colonialists.

Plaques inscribed with the apology were presented at a worship service at the William Knibb Memorial Church in Trelawny, and at a St. James Baptist Association worship service at the Mount Carey Baptist Church.

The team visited other Baptist churches and sites of historic significance including East Queen Street, the oldest Baptist church in the island, Sligoville, the first Free Village founded by Baptists in the 1830s, the Philippo Baptist Church, and Calabar High School for boys, founded by Baptists in 1912.

Meetings were also held with the officers and Executive Committee of the JBU.

The team that traveled to Jamaica to deliver the apology comprised BUGB General Secretary, Jonathan Edwards; BMS World Mission General Director, Alistair Brown; Wale Hudson-Roberts, racial justice coordinator of the BUGB; and Pat White of the London Baptist Association and the Black and Ethnic Minority Ministers’ Forum and Churches.

Baptists in South Africa have come to the aid of those displaced by ethnic violence.

More than 60 immigrants from other countries have been killed and almost 700 injured in violence that erupted in Johannesburg, Cape Town and other cities in May. Immigrants are accused by some of the country’s citizens of taking away jobs and housing from South Africans.

Dave Stemmett of the Baptist Refugee Centre in Cape Town said, “We started to get desperate calls from people linked to our ministry,” about the needs of persons who have been displaced. He reported that there are “1,500 displaced refugees on the streets near our local rail station.”

Several churches are housing persons displaced by the violence. “At present we are housing and feeding around 250 people in three venues,” Stemmett reported. After government authorities opened camps, “many of the people in our care were bussed to these places. We were able to close down
United States

Caribbean Immigrants Form Baptist Organization

A worship service to officially launch the Caribbean Diaspora Baptist Clergy Association (CDBCA) was held in New York City on Sunday, March 30.

Held at Grace Baptist Chapel in Bronx, home to a congregation of mainly Caribbean immigrants, the “celebrative service” was “to give recognition (to) an organization which has become a reality after a decade of discussion and deliberation.”

According to Alfred Johnson, a former Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU) pastor who now lives and pastors in New Jersey, “Over the past 40 to 50 years, what started as a trickle has now become a steady stream of immigrants into this country…. We were indeed strangers in a foreign land, living in exile from our home in the Caribbean, away from our Baptist fellowship.”

The idea to form the Caribbean Baptist group was first mooted in 1993 when then JBU president, Roy Henry, met with a group of Caribbean Baptists at Bronx Baptist Church, which was founded by Jamaican Samuel Simpson in the 1960s.

After a mission conference in the Jamaican north coast town of Ocho Rios in 2003, the Jamaica Baptist Union Mission Agency (JBUMA) stated its intention “to participate in mission to Caribbean people in general and to Jamaicans in particular who are in the Diaspora (e.g. United Kingdom, USA and Canada).”

CDBCA, which was incorporated in 2006, signed a partnership agreement with the JBU in April 2007 at Grace Baptist Chapel in Bronx to aid in “facilitating mission in both regions of the world,” meaning the Caribbean and North America.

In October, the JBU, the CDBCA, and the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF), one of six continental unions affiliated with the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), signed the Montego Bay Accord, the document released after the JBUMA mission conference in the tourist capital of Jamaica. Among other provisions, the accord includes the development of “meaningful ministries with cultural relevance,” while the parties agreed “to submit ourselves to periodic reviews, and to hold each other accountable under God.”

CDBCA draws membership mainly from Caribbean clergy living and working in the northeast corridor of the United States in New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland. Its president is Delroy Reid-Salmon, pastor of Grace Baptist Chapel.

Among those attending and speaking at the worship service to launch the CDBCA were Eron Henry, communications director for the BWA, Peter Pinder, Executive Secretary/Treasurer of CBF, and Stephen Jennings, JBU president. Horace Russell, a member of the BWA Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission and the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup who is a retired professor of historical theology at Palmer Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and former president of the United Theological College of the West Indies, gave the keynote address.

a number of our more temporary shelters as well as those in more vulnerable areas.” Approximately 10,000 persons have been bussed by the government into a camp outside Johannesburg.

But facilities used by the refugee center are being strained. “We need to come up with long term solutions,” Stemmett said. “It is winter in South Africa and very cold and wet in Cape Town right now,” he said. The Baptist Refugee Centre is trying to get churches in South Africa to adopt displaced migrants.

The Baptist Union of South Africa appealed to its congregations to assist pastors “who are currently ministering to the victims of the violence.” The BWA member body, in an open letter “to all BUSA churches and fellowships,” stated that the pastors “are fulfilling an important Biblical role and need your support.”

The letter also called on South African Baptists to “pray continuously and earnestly for this crisis within our country,” and that “perpetrators of the violence will be brought to justice.” More than 1,300 persons have been arrested.

Migrant workers from Somalia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Ghana, Uganda, and the Cape Verde islands, have been among those attacked. An estimated 50,000 migrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique left the country due to the violence.
More than 130 houses were burned in a hilly region of Bangladesh on Tuesday, April 20, and at least nine persons were injured.

The Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF), a member body of the Baptist World Alliance, reported that six Baptist families were among those who lost their homes. One Baptist church building was also torched.

The arson attacks resulted from tension between Bengali settlers and indigenous communities in Rangamati, a regional district in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of southeastern Bangladesh. Bengalis comprise 98 percent of the population of Bangladesh. The other two percent is mostly Bihari migrants and indigenous tribal groups. Thirteen tribal groups are located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Even though Christians are less than one percent of the population in Bangladesh, Christianity, including Baptists, has a significant presence among tribal groups mostly in the hilly, rural regions of the country.

Bengalis are moving into areas normally settled by the indigenous tribal groups, and are allegedly driving some tribes from their lands, creating tension. According to the Daily Star, the largest circulating English language daily newspaper in Bangladesh, “Victims of an arson attack on four hilly villages… alleged that Bangalee (Bengali) settlers there set fire to their 77 houses on the night of April 20.” A later report by the same newspaper put the number of homes “burnt to ashes” at 132.

Dennis Datta, a former president and general secretary for BBCF, and recipient of the 2008 BWA Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award, indicated that BBCF leaders were to meet on May 1 to discuss the incidents.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts, as well as parts of Northeast India that border Bangladesh, have recently been affected by food shortages due to rat infestation of agricultural fields, a phenomenon caused by bamboo flowering. The flowering occurs in long cycles ranging from every 10 to 60 years, depending on the bamboo species. During the flowering cycle, the number of rodents increases significantly. Rodents eat the protein contained in the bamboo seeds, and also destroy other standing crops and edible grain, causing famine.

Datta appealed to Baptists for their help and prayer. “Please remember the situation and the believers in your prayers and if the Lord leads you to take some steps please do that,” said Datta, who is to receive the BWA human rights award at the General Council meeting planned for Prague in the Czech Republic in July.

A Baptist World Aid-sponsored conference on HIV/AIDS was held in Zimbabwe in February.

The conference, which took place in the Zimbabwe capital of Harare, had in attendance 65 delegates from South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, and the host country. Eleven Baptist conventions and unions, including five from Zimbabwe and three from South Africa, were represented.

“It was thrilling to hear how Baptist churches in the southern part of Africa are responding to the challenge of HIV and AIDS and poverty,” Angelo Scheepers, chairman for the southern region of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, reported.

Among other topics, delegates discussed institutional and community care, foster parenting and orphan care, counseling HIV victims, and HIV and AIDS and the local church.

On the last day of the conference, held January 30 to February 3, delegates adopted the Harare Resthaven Declaration, declaring that they “share God’s concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of all people from every kind of oppression, especially that of poverty and HIV and AIDS.”

The delegates confessed that “our churches have not done enough to prevent and alleviate poverty and to combat the spread and effects of HIV and AIDS,” and that “our failure has escalated the effects of social injustices such as prostitution, human trafficking, child labor, violent crime and many other social ills.”

The meeting affirmed “that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ rejects every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination. We should therefore not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist.”

The delegates committed to implement the declaration within their respective conventions and unions.

Delegates attending the HIV/AIDS conference in Zimbabwe
Led by Laszlo Pavelcze of Hungary, the Rescue24 team distributed tents, blankets, medicines and food in the town of Peng Zhou in Sichuan Province, which is just 30 kilometers from the epicenter of the 7.9 magnitude quake.

Peng Zhou is in particular need. Ninety-five percent of the houses in the town collapsed, “and the ones standing are likewise life threatening and have to be pulled down,” the BWA was informed.

There are concerns that diseases may break out as “the masses of dead bodies could not be buried and are contaminating the drinking water.” Before May 12, the town had 10,000 residents, but the quake left only 3,000 alive. “The death toll may go further up as diseases start to take new victims,” the BWAid Rescue24 team reported.

“The situation in Peng Zhou is desperate. There are no camps for the 3,000 still alive in the town.” Attempts were being made by BWAid Rescue24 to acquire 400 large tents, which cost US$90 each. The priority, Pavelcze said, “is to give shelter, food and basic hygiene.”

The initial cost of providing relief to the victims in Peng Zhou was US$165,000, which included medicines and medical supplies, tents, plastic roofing, blankets, rice, and other food items. BWAid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, sent an initial sum of US$25,000 for relief in Peng Zhou.

The powerful quake, which was felt in other parts of China as well as in the nearby countries of Pakistan, Vietnam and Thailand, has killed almost 70,000 persons, with widespread fears that the death toll will rise even further as more than 18,000 are listed as missing and between 4.8 and 11 million are homeless.

Donations to the China earthquake relief effort may be made to the BWAid Emergency Response Fund at:

www.bwanet.org/bwaid

or sent to:

Emergency Response Fund
Baptist World Aid
405 North Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046 USA

Top: A soldier assists a grieving mother after the earthquake in Sichuan Province in China

Left: Residents make their way through the rubble in one of the towns devastated by the earthquake in China

(Photos: Reuters/Stringer/ Courtesy of www.alertnet.org)
When Cyclone Nargis, packing 200-kilometer-per-hour winds, landed on the central coastal region of Myanmar on May 2, lasting until the 3rd, it became the deadliest natural disaster in the history of the Southeast Asian country. The Irrawaddy Delta, which accounts for at least 60 percent of the country’s rice crop, Myanmar’s staple food, was inundated with tidal waves and floodwaters. More than 134,000 persons died, and much of the country’s source of food supply was wiped out.

The disaster was particularly significant for Baptists. After India, Myanmar, formerly known as Burma and renamed in 1989, has the largest Baptist population in Asia. As a Baptist body, the Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC), with 1.1 million members, is the largest Baptist convention on the Asian continent. (India, though having more Baptists, has more than 20 Baptist conventions and unions).

Baptists, like other citizens, suffered a heavy toll. More than 10,000 Baptists died, and more than 94,000 were severely affected, losing homes, agricultural fields, and being displaced.

Scores of churches were destroyed or badly damaged, and the MBC headquarters in Yangon, the nation’s largest city and former capital, suffered damage that will cost an estimated US$100,000 to repair.

The response from Baptists around the world was swift. Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, immediately made US$50,000 available for relief. BWAid prepared its Rescue24 unit, which does search, rescue, and relief work, to enter the country.

The German Baptist union responded quickly by offering 40,000 Euros. Hungarian Baptist Aid leaders, who doubled as BWAid Rescue24 team leaders, and Rescue24 volunteers from the United States and Australia, flew quickly into Bangkok, Thailand, with hopes of getting visas to enter Myanmar. Volunteers from other countries, such as Singapore, were on standby to join those waiting in Bangkok.

Even though only a small number of BWAid Rescue24 representatives were allowed to enter the country, they made a vast difference. Working in six camps where approximately 15,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were living in crowded, cramped conditions, they distributed drinking water, rice, salt, oil, blankets and plastic sheeting for the victims. “The assistance is literally saving lives at this point, with situations of widespread diarrhea, and serious electricity and water shortages,” Rescue24 volunteers on the ground reported.

The MBC, which is made up of 18 smaller regional and language conventions, had, by then, established the Nargis Relief and Rehabilitation Central Committee, which included Baptist leaders from Nargis-struck areas of the Kayin, Pwo Kayin, and Asho Chin conventions, and the Myanmar Baptist Churches Union. BWAid Rescue24 and MBC collaborated in the relief efforts.

Fears are widespread that the effects of the calamity will continue as many more may die from diseases and starvation. “Cyclone Nargis destroyed the greatest rice productive fields and the animals used in agricultural work, leaving thousands with no hope for food for the next year,” Rescue24 leaders reported. Furthermore, fishing, another major source of food, was not being done, “due to the fact that the masses of dead bodies could not be buried, local officials had to throw them into the rivers . . . Locals refuse to continue fishery from the contaminated water.”

K.D. Tu Lum, General Secretary for MBC, told the BWA that “at present the basic needs of the people are foodstuffs, clothes and tents or construction materials,” but stated that “it is advised to assist in cash instead of in kind.” Initial
estimates were that it would cost between US$125 and US$500 to build a Burmese house.

Nyaw Simon, a Myanmar refugee living in Canada, appealed for assistance for her country. “Please help Burma in any way you can. . . . Burmese people are strong and courageous in the midst of many hardships,” said the daughter of Saw Simon, founder and principal of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College in the Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border.

Saw Simon received the BWA Human Rights Award in 2000 for his work among refugees from Myanmar who fled their country due to oppression by the military government.

“I hope Burma will rise up again someday,” Nyaw Simon said.

Donations to the Myanmar relief effort may be made to the BWAid Emergency Response Fund at:

www.bwanet.org/bwaid

or sent to: Emergency Response Fund
Baptist World Aid
405 North Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046 USA

This message, written by a volunteer on a front door header, expresses the hopes of more than 70 Baptist World Alliance (BWA) volunteers who built houses in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana, for six families affected by Hurricane Rita.

The category five hurricane, with winds in excess of 155 miles per hour, weakened in strength to a category three before making landfall on the Gulf Coast of the United States in September of 2005. Storm surge, winds, rains and tornados spawned by the hurricane caused substantial damage in Louisiana, eastern Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama.

When the hurricane blew over Vermilion Parish in southwest Louisiana with winds up to 100 miles per hour, it caused an initial storm surge of 20 feet.

(Continued on next page)
that flooded the southern coastal areas of the parish. After a second surge, more than 75 percent of the parish was flooded.

The winds and flooding left nearly one third of the homes in the parish damaged or destroyed. Almost three years after the hurricane, the parish is still recovering. Many people remain in temporary housing, or still live in their damaged homes.

The BWA, in partnership with the Lafayette affiliate of Habitat for Humanity, sponsored a four-week BWA Blitz Build from April 20 to May 17, 2008, to provide houses for six families who lost their homes during Hurricane Rita.

The Blitz Build is part of a continuing response by the BWA to the aftermath of both Hurricane Katrina, which hit the Gulf Coast in August 2005, and Hurricane Rita. Immediately following the storms, Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the BWA, provided $25,000 grants to Baptist organizations in the United States including the Alabama Baptist State Convention, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Missionary Convention, Inc., the Louisiana Baptist Convention, the Mississippi Baptist Convention, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. These groups helped support what local Baptists were already doing to meet the needs of their communities.

The partnership with Habitat for Humanity International is also not new. Last year, with the help of Canadian Baptist Ministries and the umbrella group, Baptist Builders – a collaborative initiative between the American Baptists Churches in the USA, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Alliance of Baptists, the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, and BWAid – 12 Habitat homes were built in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. More than 450 volunteers gave of their time for the two week construction project.

This year, the BWA sponsored its own Blitz Build in the city of Kaplan in Vermilion Parish. The BWA sought assistance for the Blitz Build from churches throughout North America, including BWA Global Impact Churches (GICs), and they responded, both by sending volunteers and by sending funds to help with the cost of construction. Three GICs, First Baptist Church (FBC) of Wilmington, North Carolina, Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, Virginia, and Seventh & James Baptist Church, in Waco, Texas, each contributed $10,000 of seed money toward the construction of three of the houses. This money, plus an additional $30,000 of seed money contributed by BWAid for three of the homes, was added to a large anonymous donation that paid the bulk of the amount required to build the houses.

Baptist Volunteers

Volunteers from Sun City West, Arizona, to Toronto, Canada, from Arlington, Virginia, to Birmingham, Alabama, came together to construct the six houses. In total, volunteers represented 16 churches from 10 states and one province. Some participants were experienced builders, while others were novices picking up a table saw for the first time. Volunteers ranged in age from teens to those well into their retirement years.

While their backgrounds were different, all made sacrifices to participate in the build, whether giving of their finances, or using their limited vacation time from work. Volunteers were eager to respond tangibly to help families in need. As Gloria Kwembe from the Church at Clarendon
in Arlington, Virginia, said, “It gave me comfort seeing first hand God’s love in action.”

A group of eight men from FBC of Wilmington came to Vermilion Parish for the first week of the BWA Blitz Build. The team worked on the house their church supported financially, the future home of Suzette Bonin and her young daughter who lost their home and all of their belongings in the hurricane. The experienced and hard-working team was the first to raise all four walls of a house.

The Blitz Build was the fourth time FBC of Wilmington had sent workers to the Gulf Coast since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck in 2005. Almost 130 church members have travelled to the region to participate in clean-up and rebuilding projects.

Allen and Beth Garner from FBC of Lee’s Summit, Missouri, participated in the third week of construction and Allen served as a house leader. The couple feels called to construction ministry and has participated in building projects several times over the past few years. In describing their involvement with the BWA build, Beth said, “What a great organization for cooperation opportunities. We like the idea of working with people from all over the world to present the Gospel through actions and relationships.”

FBC of Lee’s Summit has been involved in hurricane relief every year since the hurricanes. In 2006 and 2007, a combined total of 72 individuals went to Mississippi to work with First Baptist Church of Bay St. Louis as the church ministered to residents during the rebuilding of their homes. FBC of Lee’s Summit also sent volunteers to help with the first Baptist Blitz Build, held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 2007.

A team of nine from Harvest Pointe Community Church in Charles Town, West Virginia, an associate member of the BWA, helped second week of the build. The team’s participation was part of a project of their church called “The Kingdom Assignment.” Church members were charged with investing in building God’s Kingdom on earth, and the group of nine chose to invest their time and resources in assisting those devastated by the hurricanes.

Team member Miriam Brancato said, “The Kingdom Assignment project has opened the eyes of many of our members to look beyond the apparent needs in our local community and cast our eyes upon the fields that are white unto harvest around the world. We pray that this [BWA Blitz Build] trip will be the beginning of a dynamic missions program in our church.”

Although the build has reached its conclusion, the experience continues to have an impact on those involved, both the churches and the individuals. The associate pastor of FBC Sun City West in Arizona reported, “This was the first time for our church to be involved with a building project of this magnitude. Our hope was that the returning missionary team’s report would generate greater interest for future projects. I believe that has happened as several have said they hope we do this again next year.”

At the beginning of the BWA Blitz Build, there were six foundations of recently-poured slabs of concrete. Now there are six homes standing on Remington Road in Kaplan, Louisiana, offering hope and stability to new homeowners who are making a new start. The 70-plus volunteers who helped make this possible would share Bruce Dubberstein’s sentiment about participating in the build, “We discovered muscles that we had not used in a long time – we were sore, but it felt good.”

For reports and photos from the BWA Blitz Build, visit the blog, bwablitzbuild.blogspot.com.
The Baptist World Alliance (BWA), with a membership of 214 conventions and unions in more than 130 countries, has more than 170,000 churches represented in the BWA family. The BWA recognizes that the churches of our member bodies are on the frontlines of ministry, and works to support our member conventions and unions by supporting their churches. In turn, some of the strongest churches in our Baptist family support the ministry of the BWA. These churches are designated as BWA Global Impact Churches.

BWA Global Impact Churches are some of the most mission-minded churches in the world. In addition to all of their other missions giving—and all of the Global Impact Churches have an impressive array of both domestic and global mission activities—each has a strong commitment to support Baptists’ joint worldwide ministry through the Baptist World Alliance. Together the more than 600 Global Impact Churches give a substantial percentage of the BWA’s annual budget and they provide prayer support and mission volunteers for BWA ministries.

What do these churches receive in return? First, they receive regular reports through the Baptist World magazine and other BWA mailings about lives that are being changed as people receive aid, training, support, and fellowship through the BWA. Second, the BWA staff works to include these churches in the hands-on ministry projects of the BWA. Custom designed mission projects and mission support is provided upon request to meet each church’s unique mission goals. Church to church partnerships are encouraged between BWA Global Impact Churches in different parts of the world. And when needed, BWA conferences and guests are hosted by BWA Global Impact Churches.

Beyond the basic giving threshold necessary to be designated as a BWA Global Impact Church (the equivalent of US$1,000 in North America, US$500 in other developed countries and US$250 for churches in the developing world), there are William Carey and Adoniram Judson churches that give the equivalent of at least US$5,000 and US$10,000 respectively.

Increasingly, Baptist churches everywhere are recognizing that the BWA is one of the best agencies through which to invest their mission funds. Why? The BWA works through local churches and national conventions and unions to carry out its work. This means the most effective type of ministry possible in that cultural context is carried out by local people who uniquely understand the needs.

Plan now to include the BWA in your church’s mission budget and become a BWA Global Impact Church. Forms to enroll in the program can be found on the BWA website at www.bwanet.org.

— Alan Stanford

The Kuala Lumpur Baptist Church (KLBC) in Malaysia reflects the diversity of the prosperous, Muslim-majority Southeast Asian country. The church conducts 12 worship services catering to the different language groups that make up its membership. In addition to Mandarin and Cantonese, there are English, Korean and Filipino services. Several language groups from Myanmar are represented, including the Chin, Falam, Mizo and Karen groups.

KLBC’s motto, “To know Christ and make Him known,” reflects “our heart for outreach, not only within the local community, but also to lands beyond our shores.” The mission program budget has been increased “to provide for the equipping of God’s workers, church planting, foreign missions, supporting parachurch organizations, and helping other Baptist churches.”

This strong orientation toward mission has led KLBC to become a Global Impact Church where it can share in the international programs of the Baptist World Alliance.
The heart for mission is reflected in its own ministry in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia’s capital. KLBC “seeks to reach the community through the preschool and home school program” where “most of the preschoolers come from non-Christian homes.” On Saturdays, 150 to 180 children, most of whom are also from non-Christian families, gather to share fellowship, enjoy games, and to hear Bible stories.

Founded in 1952, KLBC has had to constantly seek larger space and expand facilities to meet its growing needs. “We are now looking into further expansion of our church facilities to cater for the rising demands and growth of the various ministries.” The church reported that “a rebuilding plan is already in progress and God willing, a new phase of our physical growth will kick off soon.”

If the church has a heart for mission, prayer is at the heart of its mission. During the week, various Care Groups meet in homes for prayer, fellowship and study. “Once a week, we hold our Morning Watch at 6:30 a.m. and members are encouraged to come back and pray for each other, for the church, for the nation and for the needs around us.”

Pastor of KLBC, John Kok, has been a leader of Baptists in his country and Asia. A former president of the Malaysia Baptist Convention, he is currently vice president of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA. Kok is a member of the General Council of the BWA and of the Resolutions Committee.

Malaysia has a relatively small Christian population of just 9 percent among its 27.5 million people. More than 60 percent of the nation’s population is Muslim and just over 19 percent is Buddhist. Even though the Malaysian constitution guarantees religious freedom, it also defines ethnic Malays as Muslims. In some states, restraints are placed on construction of religious buildings and the celebration of certain religious observances.

But the Baptist church stated that in spite of “restrictions in our efforts to reach our fellow countrymen for the Lord, our prayer is that we be found faithful and joyful in fulfilling God’s purpose for our church despite the obstacles and challenges along the way.”

First Baptist Church of Vancouver

“Changed lives, renewed marriages, restored families, healthier workplaces, churches and communities.” These lofty goals characterize the ministry outreach of First Baptist Church, Vancouver, in western Canada.

To fulfill these aims, the church conducted 2,219 professional counseling sessions in 2007 alone, through its Vancouver Christian Counselling Centre, an “on-site centre providing professional counseling to the people of the church, the larger Christian community and to the greater community at large.” The center recently celebrated its 25th anniversary.

This is just one aspect of First Baptist’s ministry outreach. The congregation recently helped in constructing facilities at a nearby kindergarten school. Its shelter program prepares hot meals for more than 100 persons every Tuesday and accommodates more than 30 in its overnight shelter. Paper Cup, initiated by the church’s young adults, provides supper and conversation to street youth every Saturday evening. Urban Promise runs Camp Joy, an after-school program for children in downtown Vancouver. Members minister to seniors at a neighborhood center that offers assisted living.

Through its Serving Training Energizing Partnership, the church works with the African Brotherhood Church. The partnership is facilitated by

(Continued on next page)
Once Baptist Church

Once Baptist Church is located in the Once district of downtown Buenos Aires, Argentina.

A diverse congregation, it draws membership from the neighborhood as well as many who travel long distances to attend. Almost all South American countries and provinces in Argentina are represented in the congregation. Members vary in profession, age, and economic status, including from the very poor to the very rich. The church’s pastor, Tomás Mackey, says the diversity “gives an extraordinary richness, but also means that the church program has to be as flexible as needed to adapt to the different needs of its members, without losing the eternal essence of the message of the cross.”

Diversity is also reflected in two missions of the church, one in a poor area of Tucuman province in the northern part of Argentina, and one in the Recoleta district, an expensive neighborhood in Buenos Aires that did not have a church presence until OBC settled there. “Our church’s program is intended to meet the needs of both different populations,” said Mackey.

The church has several programs to help meet the needs of the surrounding community. Many of the families living in the neighborhood around OBC are poor with no jobs, low levels of education and large, young families. For the past 15 years, OBC has operated a lunch program that serves about 80 people each day, primarily senior adult women, pregnant women and children below school age. In addition to a food, clothes and medicine pantry, the church conducts courses to help persons improve their labor skills, such as embroidering, cooking, carpentry, electrical work, and foreign languages, and classes to help those who are below their age level in school.

Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM), a member body of the Baptist World Alliance. First Baptist members have visited Kenya in East Africa to work with Guardians of Hope, an HIV/AIDS ministry supported by CBM.

All this is to fulfill the church’s stated purpose of loving God, loving neighbor, loving each other, and to practically fulfill the motto, “Becoming good neighbors.”

As a Global Impact Church of the BWA, First Baptist Vancouver participates in the ministries of the international church body. In the summer of 2008, representatives from the church will attend the Annual Gathering in Prague, Czech Republic, and the BWA Youth Conference in Leipzig, Germany.

With values centered on worship, prayer, evangelism, generosity and a commitment to being good neighbors, the congregation reflects the face of grace and love as expressed in Christ.
Global Impact Churches: A Region to Imitate
by Neville Callam

A quick survey of the performance of the Global Impact Church (GIC) program which was developed in 2003 supplies ample evidence for the way in which a regional Baptist grouping can help the Baptist World Alliance advance in its faithfulness to the mission God has committed to it.

Since the program started full operation in 2004, 654 churches have signaled their commitment to share in the work of the BWA by becoming participants. The overwhelming majority of these churches are from the region of the North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF) where many churches manifest a firm grasp on the global dimensions of Christian mission.

The BWA owes a significant debt of gratitude to these churches for their faithfulness to the mandate Christ has given to the church and for choosing to give expression to their mission consciousness through participation in the GIC program.

In order to help readers understand the vital witness the churches in the NABF have provided through their collaboration in the GIC program, we list below a sample of 21 churches that have contributed a total of just over one million dollars to the BWA, since the commencement of the GIC program.

Mountain Brook Baptist and Shades Crest Baptist in Birmingham, Alabama
First Baptist in Pensacola, Florida and Grace Baptist in Woodbridge, Virginia
First Baptist in Plano, Texas and Columbia Baptist in Falls Church, Virginia
Alfred Street Baptist in Alexandria, Virginia and McLean Baptist in McLean, Virginia
Trinity Baptist in San Antonio, Texas and Trinity Baptist in the Bronx, New York
First Baptist in Lafayette, Louisiana and First Baptist in Sun City West, Arizona
First Baptist in Richmond, Virginia and First Baptist in Gainesville, Georgia
First Baptist in Stockton, California and Park Cities Baptist in Dallas, Texas
The Heights Baptist in Richardson, Texas and Shearer Heights Baptist in San Antonio, Texas
First Baptist in Marietta, Georgia, University Baptist in Baltimore, Maryland and Celebration Baptist in Hoschton, Georgia.

Needless to say, the BWA is very grateful to the pastors and members of Global Impact Churches through whose generosity the BWA has been helped in its resolve to fulfill its vocation through the worldwide Baptist movement. For these, and the other Global Impact Churches, we will unceasingly give thanks to God.
Trinity Baptist Church

Trinity Baptist Church (TBC) in the Bronx, New York, has had a long association with the Baptist World Alliance. TBC is a BWA Global Impact Church, and is one of the top 10 givers among the 600-plus GIC members. It has, over the years, supported Baptist World Aid and the BWA Youth Department, apart from its contribution to the GIC program.

Its current pastor, Naomi Tyler-Lloyd, has been personally involved in the work and ministry of the BWA. She served as conference chairman for the BWA Youth Conference held in Hong Kong in 2004, and currently sits on the Commission on Baptist Worship and Spirituality, the BWAid Committee, the Human Rights Award Committee, the Congress Program Committee, and the Youth Executive Committee, among others.

Such BWA involvement is an extension of a mission-focused agenda of the church. The church, Tyler-Lloyd says, “gives 10 percent of its budget off the top to mission.” She was careful to inform *Baptist World* magazine that, even though the word “mission” is not in its name, Trinity was “incorporated as a missionary Baptist church” and has had “mission as its focus from conception.”

Founded in 1899, making it one of the oldest Black churches in Williams Bridge, northeast Bronx, the 1,200-member congregation has done mission outreach in such places as Haiti and Liberia. Its Friends in Mission program funds a nutritional center in Haiti, particularly aimed at children, and its Senior Missionary Society assists students in that country.

Approximately 30 years ago, Trinity built a church in Liberia, through the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention.

That church is named the Nathaniel Tyler-Lloyd Baptist Chapel after Naomi’s father, who was pastor of Trinity from 1960 until 2002. TBC’s Willing Workers Missionary also sponsors other building programs and food distribution on the African continent.

The international thrust of TBC’s ministry involvement reflects itself in the congregation’s makeup, with a diversity of cultures drawn from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and the African American community in the Bronx.

But while the church engages in international mission, it is deeply community-oriented. It sponsors a home for girls in the Bronx, owns an apartment block that houses elders, single parents and battered women, and runs a dynamic youth program that, among other things, does ministry visits to hospitals.

Naomi comes from a strong Baptist heritage. Her father, Nathaniel, was firm in his support of the BWA, having been on the Executive Committee and General Council, and serving as a vice president of the international body at the time of his death. He was president of Lott Carey from 1984 to 1986, during which time the historically African American mission body became an active supporter of the BWA.

Naomi’s mother, Portia, succeeded her husband as a BWA vice president upon his death in 2002, and currently serves on the Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation, the Personnel Committee, and the Membership Committee, among others.

Pastor Naomi Tyler-Lloyd says that the church “should set the standard for the world, not the world for the church,” and that Trinity “takes responsibility for the community and the world.”
First Baptist Church of Richmond

First Baptist Church of Richmond (FBC), located in the capital city of Virginia in the United States, seeks to minister effectively to its local community, but also recognizes its role as a member of the larger worldwide family of believers.

Mission is a strong emphasis of the church, and has been throughout its illustrious past. The church, which originated in 1780 at a prayer meeting held in the midst of the Revolutionary War, and which was the first Baptist church to be established in a Virginia city, was also the first in the state to have a missionary society for women, and the first in the country to send its own members as missionaries to Africa.

In 1815, Deacon William Crane opened a school for slaves where they could learn reading, writing and arithmetic and study the Bible. As a result of this ministry of the church, two of Crane’s students, Lott Cary and Collin Teague, purchased their freedom and went to Liberia in 1821 to serve as missionaries.

FBC recognizes that “our Lord has chosen local churches such as ours to fulfill His work of compassionate outreach and evangelism” and states that “our passion is to see people come to know and worship God in Jesus Christ here in Richmond and throughout the world. We do not seek to fulfill this commitment alone but in cooperation with others of like mind.”

FBC has established partnerships with churches and ministries within the USA and around the world. These partnerships are “an avenue of transformation as we go not only to share our God-given gifts but to receive what God has in store for us through Spirit-filled relationships.”

A partnership with the Baptist Church of Salzburg, Austria, began in 2000. Teams from FBC travel and serve at the request of the Austrian church; on several occasions teams from Salzburg have also served at FBC. Partnerships have also been established with churches and organizations in Curitiba, Brazil; Xi’an, China; the Pacific Rim; Honduras; Toronto, Canada; the Middle East; and South Africa, among others.

These partnerships are not kept for a set length of time, but are evaluated year to year. FBC’s partners generally send requests for projects to fulfill needs that they have, and FBC seeks to fill them by sending church members. FBC teams have taught English, conducted camps for children, engaged in HIV/AIDS ministry and medical missions, and other activities. FBC and the partnering churches maintain contact throughout the year by exchanging news and prayer requests.

A current partnership exists between FBC and the Baptist church in Ruzomberok, Slovakia. Almost 70 FBC youth will travel to Slovakia this summer to do painting, construction, yard cleaning and renovation work. Afterwards the youth from FBC and the youth from the Ruzomberok church will go together to the Baptist Youth World Conference in Leipzig, Germany.

In addition to their international work, FBC is involved in an array of local ministries designed to meet the physical, material and spiritual needs of individuals in the Richmond community. Such ministries include a food pantry, clothes closet, and employment assistance. The urban church also provides services to the homeless such as shower facilities, laundry service, haircuts, and a special weekly worship service and meal. At-risk youth, single mothers, prisoners and international students attending a local college are all recipients of FBC’s local ministry efforts.

FBC, a Global Impact Church that supports BWA at the William Carey level of giving, is actively involved in the mission and ministry of the BWA. A former BWA President, Theodore Adams, who served from 1955-1960, came from FBC. Steve Blanchard, Minister of Missions at the church, explains the reason for FBC’s involvement: “We believe in the mission of the BWA and want to align ourselves with other Baptists, as well as other Christians, to make a difference in the world in the name of Jesus Christ for the betterment of God’s Kingdom.”
Bethel Baptist Church

Bethel Baptist Church sits in the heart of Half Way Tree, one of the busiest and most heavily trafficked sections in Jamaica’s capital city of Kingston.

By far the largest Baptist church in Jamaica, with more than 2,500 members, and one of the largest in the English-speaking Caribbean, Bethel has become the model church that other Jamaican congregations seek to emulate. Its diversity of ministry and commitment to mission have led other churches, not just Baptists, to study, and emulate its programs.

Mission is at the core of this dynamic congregation. Of note is its history in church planting. The Mona, New Haven and Greater Portmore churches, all significant congregations on their own, were birthed by Bethel.

But perhaps the most studied area of Bethel’s mission is its healing ministry. Comprehensive in its design, it includes a medical clinic, a pharmacy, as well as psychiatric care and psychological counseling. Aimed at the dispossessed and those on the margins of society in the heart of the burgeoning city, the healing ministry is staffed by a team of full time doctors, nurses, pharmacists and laboratory technicians.

According to Anthony Allen, psychiatrist and church deacon, the healing ministry at Bethel is “an example of the Total Healthcare Model” that incorporates “workplaces, congregations and communities….It involves a total vision of salvation, ministry to the total person …and it allows for total community involvement.” The ministry, he said, began in 1974, “out of a deep concern by the pastor, health professionals and the church council about the lack of integration of healing and spirituality.”

Closely related is the effort to combat HIV/AIDS. “The church budgets an amount each year to assist in the operations of the major institution involved in caring for affected persons.” It stages an annual Lapathon, held on or close to December 1 each year, World AIDS Day, to fund HIV/AIDS programs run by institutions in other parts of the country. The congregation also formed a special care unit that does follow-up work with HIV/AIDS infected or affected persons who have been referred to the church.

The church has formed several institutions on its own. There is the Bethel Foundation, which raises funds for the healing ministry; the Bethel Lay Institute, which offers training in Christian beliefs; the Bethel Baptist Thrift Cooperative, which offers savings and share accounts and loans; and a Legal Aid Clinic, which offers free and discounted legal services to the public.

The social work department of the church provides food, clothing, medical assistance and monetary gifts. The department runs a feeding program for indigents and for shut-in members. The lunch ministry offers meals at affordable prices for students and workers in the Half Way Tree area.

Bethel has repeatedly helped other, weaker congregations in Jamaica by entering into partnerships, commissioning its own members to assist in the pastoral oversight of congregations that have no pastor, and has assisted in construction or repairs of other church properties.

Members of Bethel have been on mission trips to Haiti, Guyana, and Panama. The church’s pastor, Burchell Taylor, has twice served as president of the Jamaica Baptist Union, and is currently president for the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, one of six continental unions of the Baptist World Alliance. He sits on the General Council and Executive Committee of the BWA.

Bethel’s youth ministry, one of the most dynamic of any Baptist church in the country, sent its steel band to perform at the BWA Youth Conference in Hong Kong in 2004. Michael Taylor of Bethel is the current president of the Youth Department of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, and is a member of the Executive Committee for the BWA Youth Department.

Bethel Baptist Church has, in its 54 years, become the model church where its commitment to the cause of Christ has shaped its mission to community, country and beyond.
Skien Baptist Church

Skien, a southeastern Norwegian town with a history of at least 11 centuries, rests on a fjord that provides the entry to the mountainous ski region known as Telemark. Skien was the birthplace of Norway’s most famous son, playwright Henrik Ibsen, in the nineteenth century.

The town of 50,000 residents is also the site of a historic Baptist congregation that regularly supports Baptist causes as a BWA Global Impact Church. Skien Baptist Church (SBC) was the first Baptist congregation in Norway. It formed in April 1860 under the leadership of Danish evangelist Frederick Ludvig Rymker, who founded many Baptist congregations in the Scandinavian countries. This historic church has reshaped itself to address the spiritual and social needs of current generations.

SBC has a focus on ministry to children and young people from one to 25 years of age. The majority of the church’s members are young families, many of which are first generation Baptists “due to very successful youth work during the last 30 years,” according to the church’s office manager, Hans Otto Donnestad. Many of SBC’s activities, such as Sunday school classes, a baby choir, and choirs for children and youth, reflect its focus on young people.

A second primary emphasis of the church is on small group Bible studies. More than 100 of its 254 members are involved in small groups.

The church has worked in recent times to renew the Sunday morning services, which it calls “Open Door” services. SBC also recently introduced a new structure, and is focused on ensuring that all members “find a way to use their God-given gifts and talents in the areas of mission, evangelism and practical work.”

SBC ministries demonstrate the church’s mission “to convey God’s love and the good news about Jesus Christ in our own community and in a wider, global perspective.” During the past two and a half years, SBC has reached out to almost 80 refugees from Myanmar living in the Skien community, and more than 30 have become members of the church. “It is impossible to describe all the blessings we have experienced in the work of helping them and involving them in our social and spiritual fellowship,” said Donnestad.

Church members have been involved in addressing issues of freedom and justice worldwide by writing letters to state leaders where Christians are being detained or are imprisoned. They have also provided aid for victims of natural or other disasters in Myanmar, Chad, the Congo and Eastern Europe.

SBC’s global perspective is also evident in the direct partnership the church has with a Baptist church in Freetown, Sierra Leone. SBC has established partnerships with other churches through the Baptist Union of Norway and the BWA. For the past 30 years, the youth choir, Con Amore, has visited more than 100 different Baptist churches around the world.

SBC has had a presence at many major BWA meetings. Con Amore performed at the past three youth conferences in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Houston, Texas, USA; and Hong Kong; and the church choir, Basis, participated in the 2005 congress in Birmingham, England. “At the congress our church was represented by about 50 members,” said Donnestad, “and many members are already looking forward to being present at the next world congress in Honolulu.”

The congregation of SBC is steadily growing – for the past two years, membership has increased by 10 percent each year – as the church reaches out to the community and to the world with “the overall objective to win new disciples for the kingdom of God.”
Latin American Leaders Meet

The meeting, which also included general secretaries from most of the Baptist conventions and unions in Central and South America, had representation from 19 countries, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic, two Spanish-speaking islands in the Caribbean.

UBLA president Raquel Contreras, who is from Chile, described the meeting as the “realization of a dream” as it was the first meeting in Latin America where all Baptist leaders were present in the same place at the same time. The summit, she said, was planned so that Latin American Baptists would “know and understand each other and network to support each other’s work.”

Sessions focused on Baptist work and witness in countries affiliated with UBLA, one of six regional fellowships that are part of the Baptist World Alliance. There were also discussions on the state and future of UBLA itself. Alberto Prokopchuk of Argentina, General Secretary for UBLA and BWA Regional Secretary for Latin America, directed the meeting to focus on “what we can do together,” and “how we can work together to extend the kingdom of God.” Baptists in Latin America, he said, need to “proclaim a Gospel that is transforming.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, who attended the meetings along with BWA directors Fausto Vasconcelos and Eron Henry, declared that one aim of the BWA is to bring “scattered Baptists together” through such organizations as UBLA. “Since 1905, there is no turning back. Baptists around the world recognize we need each other,” Callam said. He encouraged UBLA leaders “to stand firm on the word of God, maintaining commitment to the word of God, whatever the cost.”

Conventions and unions, while focused on core Baptist priorities such as mission and evangelism, are also engaged in confronting social and other problems in their countries. The Guatemala convention is reaching out to some of the 23 ethnic minorities in the nation, most of which are marginalized and live in poverty. The convention in Ecuador has a special mission outreach to its indigenous populations.

Guatemalan Baptists developed a disaster response unit after Hurricane Mitch hit that country in 1998, while the Peru convention played an important role in relief after a violent earthquake hit the country in August 2007.

While most countries in Latin America, such as Venezuela and Colombia, give broad freedom for the proclamation of the Gospel, others, such as Costa Rica, where the Roman Catholic Church is the official religion of the state, have greater restrictions. Roman Catholicism is the majority religion in Latin America, estimated at 81 percent of the population in South America.

Reports given in meetings suggest that a number of Baptist conventions and unions in Latin America are experiencing growth, such as in El Salvador and Cuba, while others, such as in Peru, are experiencing challenges. Evangelical churches as a whole, including Baptists, are growing. In 1985, UBLA had 677,000 members; by 2007, the number increased to 1.7 million.

Callam encouraged the Baptist leaders to adopt the motto of “Every Latin American for Jesus,” reminding them that “we are part of one vast family of God’s people.”
Cuba has had a long and sustained Baptist presence. There are, currently, four Baptist conventions and unions on the Spanish-speaking island of 11 million people – the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba, the Baptist Convention of Eastern Cuba, the Free Will Baptist Convention of Cuba, and the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba. All four are member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance.

Baptist presence in Cuba began in 1879 with the return of Cubans who converted while living in Biloxi, Mississippi, in the United States. The work became more formally organized in 1886 with the return to the island of Alberto J. Díaz, who had converted while living in exile in Key West, Florida. He founded churches in the western part of the island, the first being Gethsemane Baptist Church in Havana, as well as churches in Santa Clara, Cienfuegos and Matanzas. This work later evolved into the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba.

In 1898, José O’Hallorán, who also converted while in exile, returned to Cuba and began Baptist work in Santiago de Cuba. The mission spread to other eastern towns, and later developed into the Baptist Convention of Eastern Cuba.

Thomas Willey, an American who did mission work in Peru and Panama, arrived in Cuba in 1941 as a missionary of the Free Will Baptist Church in the US and founded the first Free Baptist Church in the town of Jaruco, in the province of Havana.

The Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba broke off from the western convention in 1989 over theological and administrative differences. The BWA was instrumental in brokering dialogue that led to healing, forgiveness and reconciliation between the groups, and facilitated the acceptance of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches as a member body of the BWA.

Haitian immigrants, who began arriving in Cuba in the 1930s, founded several churches and formed the Convention of Haitian Churches in 1939 with more than 40 congregations. With new generations adapting to the Cuban culture, the Haitian convention eventually faded out of existence.

There has always been tension between the political leadership in Cuba and the Baptists. This became more pronounced in the years after the revolution in 1959. A number of seminaries were closed. Pastors were arrested and placed in labor camps to work sugar cane fields. Baptist students were prevented from attending university. Churches became pastorless and suffered, many closing their doors. Christians emigrated, especially to the United States, with the exodus picking up in the 1980s.

The communist-led government has long been accused by other governments, human rights organizations, churches and others, of committing serious human rights abuses, including placing severe restrictions on religious freedom.

But amidst the challenges Baptists faced in Cuba, there were bright spots. Thousands of Cubans refused to give up or surrender their faith. Women took the place of the men who left or were exiled or arrested and became leaders within the church.

Changes

Things began changing in the 1980s into the 1990s. The phenomenon of the house church developed and grew. Congregations gathered in “houses, garages, and under trees,” Enio Navarro, president of the eastern convention, told Baptist World magazine. Christian books and other literature were allowed to be published. In 1991, the country’s congress began accepting Christians as members of the communist party. In 1992, the constitution was amended to make Cuba secular rather than atheist, and freedom from discrimination on grounds of religion was guaranteed.

The biggest changes occurred in the wake of the 1998 visit of Pope John Paul II to Cuba. During the visit, the pope presided at four masses. Other major rallies were held with the government providing transportation.

The pontiff’s visit opened up opportunities not only for Roman Catholics, but for other Christians as well. “This encouraged evangelical Christians,” recalled Navarro. In May and June of 1999, Baptists held 16 major events in plazas and in stadiums, “including at the Revolution
Plaza,” said Navarro. Thousands of Christians, he said were mobilized. Government authorities attended the meetings.

This “created an environment for people to go to church,” said the Cuban church leader. “The church had door to door prayer walks, crusades, and accelerated church work.”

After this, “church growth exploded,” said Navarro, who pastors a congregation with more than 800 members. In 1993, the eastern convention had 9,000 members; now there are 26,000 in 360 churches. One hundred and seventy-five of the 360 congregations are house churches, and there are 720 missions. The western convention has more than 200 churches and 16,000 members, while the Freewill and Fraternity, the two smallest groups, have combined memberships of more than 6,000 and almost 70 churches.

There are plans for further growth. The eastern convention has implemented an evangelistic thrust to reach 500,000 people and plant 500 churches by 2010, while the western group aims to plant 1,000 new house churches within that time period. Together, they hope to have one million new converts by 2010.

The four Baptist groups have had increasing levels of cooperation in recent times, realizing “that working separately will not win the country,” said Elmer Lavastida, a pastor. In February 2008, the four groups, in a dramatic presentation titled, “We are one,” reenacted the coming of the first Baptists to the island in their celebration of BWA Sunday. “We celebrated with much gusto BWA Sunday,” reported Lavastida. The four bodies also shared in a 50-day emphasis on prayer and evangelism from Easter Day, March 23, to Pentecost Sunday, May 11.

Churches are reaching out to their communities. At Mayari in the mountainous region northeast of Santiago de Cuba, the Mount Zion Baptist Church implemented an agricultural project that benefits the congregation and the wider community. Built on a farm run by Eugenio Perdomo, a lay missionary, the project is aimed at boosting nutrition in the area. The farm rears rabbits, chickens, and more than 100 pigs, and is a boost to the economically depressed area. The Mayari agricultural project is only one of an increasing number of social ministry programs conducted in Cuba by Baptist churches.

Because of greater openness, Cuban Christians, Baptists included, have had increasing levels of collaboration with Christian groups and organizations outside the country. This began in earnest in 1989 when Cuba issued an invitation to the pope to visit the country. In 2000, the BWA held its annual General Council meeting in Havana, only the third such meeting in the Caribbean. BWA leaders met with former Cuban president Fidel Castro and other political leaders, which resulted in an increase in the distribution of Bibles in the country.

Baptist witness has thrived in Cuba despite, or perhaps because of, adversity. Prospects are that growth will continue to accelerate.
The Sudan Interior Church North and Sudan Interior Church South have reunited to form one convention. First constituted in 1963, the Sudan Interior Church (SIC) divided during the Second Sudanese Civil War from 1983 to 2005, during which more than two million people died and an estimated four million Sudanese were displaced.

Baptist congregations were founded in several Sudanese refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. “The scattering of the church necessitated the development of a second administrative center based in Nairobi, Kenya. The installation of SIC-South was a pragmatic attempt to minister to a dispersed church divided by warring factions,” said Elijah Brown, who has studied the state of the church in Sudan, and who is a member of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Commission on Freedom and Justice.

Brown reported that SIC “leaders insist that the church itself was not split, but administratively rearranged for a limited timeframe to further effective ministry.”

The reunification of the Baptist convention was achieved after a series of meetings beginning in April 2007. After a second meeting in November, a third meeting, held April 1 to 5, 2008, in the southern Sudanese town of Renk, resulted in unification. Ramadan Chan, who was elected General Secretary of the SIC at the meetings in early April of this year, described the occasion as one of “jubilation and praises to God for his goodness.”

Christianity has deep roots in Sudan. Some traditions hold that the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 was from what is modern-day Sudan, which encompasses the lands of several ancient kingdoms, including Kush, Darfur, and three Nubian kingdoms. Christianity was the majority religion in the region from the fifth century through to the fourteenth century before the Mamelukes (Turkish rulers in Egypt) breached Nubian defenses and established the dominance of Islam.

Baptist witness, which began in the country in 1893 through the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), a mission group, is mainly centered in the southern section of the vast country, the largest in Africa. In 2000, SIC-North reported 15,000 baptized believers. In 2007, there were 21,000. In Khartoum, the country’s capital, there are some 33 churches. The combined SIC comprises more than 225 churches and more than 40,000 baptized believers.

“Congregations gather in bombed-out sanctuaries, flimsy tin buildings, homes, and under the open sky,” according to Brown, a Texan who recently submitted a doctoral thesis to the University of Edinburgh on “The Road to Peace: The Role of the Southern Sudanese Church in Communal Stabilization and National Reconciliation.”

The BWA has had a long and active interest in Sudan, which accepted SIC as a member body in 2000, despite its divisions into north and south. Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, facilitated the reunification talks through a grant, and recently sent US$12,600 through SIM for a relief and development project, with additional amounts to be sent. One aspect of the project is assistance for 2,000 families that are living in a slum area in a displaced peoples’ camp.

In early 2007, BWAid’s Rescue24, under the direction of Hungarian Baptist Aid, sent US$10,000 to help with the cost of preventative healthcare in Sudan, administered vaccines, and treated more than 700 patients with myriad ailments and diseases.

In a July 2006 resolution passed in Mexico City, the BWA General Council, in response to wars in Sudan and the genocide in Darfur, “Requests the President and the General Secretary to give urgent consideration on how best to advocate the implementation of all Sudanese signed peace agreements and protection of human and religious rights as established by United Nations resolutions.” The resolution also “calls on all Christians to pray for the persecuted and displaced peoples of Sudan and the ongoing mission of Sudanese Christians.”

In a resolution passed in Accra, Ghana, in 2007, the BWA General Council further “maintains ongoing concern about the armed conflicts, contrived famines, destruction of communities, lack of transparent truth and accountability and other human rights violations in Sudan.”

The 2007 resolution “encourages international conventions, fellowships and churches to develop partnerships with Sudanese Baptists who have remained largely isolated,” and “calls on the President and the General Secretary especially to consider working with the (BWA) Freedom and Justice Commission to promote advocacy for Darfur through letters delivered to relevant Ambassadors, the United Nations, government officials, and other potential avenues.”
Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam visited with Baptists in New Zealand and Australia from March 28 to April 7.

Invited to speak at Epping Baptist Church in Sydney, Australia, for its 75th anniversary, Callam used the opportunity to meet Baptists in Australasia, including national and state leaders; pastors and other congregational leaders; and theological students and educators.

New Zealand

Callam visited the Baptist National Centre in Auckland, home to the Baptist Union of New Zealand (BUNZ), the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society, now known as Tranzsend, and Baptist Care Limited. At the Centre he was greeted with a Maori welcome ceremony, a tradition of the Maori, the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand. “This was a moving experience that showed the sensitivity of New Zealand Baptists to their multicultural context,” said Callam.

The BUNZ has as its vision “growing healthy churches,” and seeks to serve the local churches by equipping and resourcing them to carry out ministry and mission. “Mission is the defining purpose of our churches. The desire is that they would be both healthy and growing in fulfilling that mission,” a BUNZ statement reads.

The structure of the union reflects its church-centered focus. The union staff functions as the Consultancy, helping churches assess their health and growth through a variety of methods, and equipping churches through initiatives such as pastors clusters that encourage and train pastors; a community ministries team that assists churches to set up and run local ministries; and a children’s consultant that helps churches build and grow healthy ministry among children.

Tranzsend, the mission arm of the BUNZ, also emphasizes the role of the local church. By 2010, churches are expected to be the primary senders and supporters of their own Tranzsend workers. The mission agency, which focuses on South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, engages in development work, church planting, health care, and language training, among other ministries.

While in New Zealand, Callam also met and addressed staff and students at Carey Baptist College, the theological school of BUNZ, which was founded in 1924.

Australia

While New Zealand has a traditional structure of churches relating to a national body, in Australia each church is a member of a state convention, which in turn is a member of the national body, the Baptist Union of Australia (BUA).

In the state of New South Wales (NSW), Callam learned about the work of the Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT (Australian Capital Territory). The state convention operates Baptist Community Services (BCS), an organization that provides care and programs for the aged, including residential villages, dementia care, companionship, transportation, and home modification. BCS also provides services for the community such as counseling, professional development, child care, crisis and medium term housing and youth residential programs.

Callam was also introduced to the work of the national body. BUA’s focus is on national and international ministries, including Crossover, Baptist World Aid Australia, and Global Interaction. Crossover encourages a commitment to...
evangelism by resourcing churches, equipping pastors and leaders, and facilitating missional dialogue. Baptist World Aid Australia, BUA’s relief and development agency, works to bring people out of poverty through its child sponsorship program, community development projects, and emergency relief. Global Interaction, previously known as the Australian Missionary Baptist Society, is the cross-cultural mission agency of the BUA. The 120-year old agency currently has 140 cross-cultural workers, 40 home workers, and sends 225 persons on short term mission experiences each year.

Also during his time in Australia, Callam visited two theological schools, one in NSW, and one in the state of Western Australia (WA). He met with students and faculty and preached at a chapel service at Morling College in Sydney, NSW, which is headed by Principal Ross Clifford, who also serves as President of the BUA. In Perth, WA, Callam spoke at the name change service for Vose Seminary, formerly the Baptist Theological College of WA. The school was renamed in honor of Noel Vose, its founding principal, and BWA president from 1985-1990. The new name reflects the school’s desire to be a place of nurture and growth, the original meaning of the term, “seminary”, and to show an openness to non-Baptists who wish to study there.

Callam’s experiences in Australasia, with national and state conventions and at theological schools, pastors meetings, and churches – Spreydon Baptist Church in Christchurch, New Zealand, and Epping Baptist Church in Sydney, Australia – demonstrated to him how “both New Zealand and Australian Baptists are seeking to address ways in which to spread the Gospel in postmodern, post-Christian contexts.”

Regarding the work of the Baptist unions in the two countries, Callam concluded, “Both bodies are very serious about ministry and are addressing the need for appropriate new structures for their situation. Mostly, they are trying to ensure that the structures rest on solid biblical-theological foundations.”

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**In Honor Of**

By Robert Licitra in honor of James Kagia  
By Mrs. Stewart Bush in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Lauris M. Eek

**In Memory Of**

By Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hensley in memory of Mrs. Helen Seat

**For BWAid:**

By Mrs. Carolyn Worthy  
in memory of her husband, Rev. Charles Worthy  
By Jeffrey and Carol Jordan  
in memory of Jan Jamieson, Paul Montacute’s aunt  
By Mrs. Alvin O. West  
in memory of Frank Ed McAnear

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**Our grateful thanks to the following friends for their gifts to the Baptist World Alliance**

**Gifts to Baptist World Aid in memory of Mrs. Helen Peck Jones were given by:**

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**A gift to the Baptist World Alliance for the William J. Cumbie Emerging Leaders Fund, in memory of William J. Cumbie, was given by:**

Mary Ruth Clarke
In Memoriam

W.G. Wickremasinghe, a former chairman of the Baptist World Alliance Youth Department, died on March 21. A Sri Lankan, Wickremasinghe was BWA youth chairman in the 1960s, and was the founding president of the Asia Baptist Youth Fellowship, the youth arm of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation.

Director of Baptist World Aid, Paul Montacute, who is a past BWA Youth Director, said that “Wickremasinghe was a keen worker for Christ through the Baptist denomination at the local, national and worldwide levels.”

Montacute recalls his first meeting with Wickremasinghe, who later became a longtime president of Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya, the Baptist union in that country. “He was the chair of the BWA Youth Department at the time of the 1963 Baptist Youth World Conference in Beirut, Lebanon. This was my first youth conference. I had the privilege of knowing him for the last 45 years.”

A funeral service was held on Saturday, March 22, at the Baptist Church, Cinnamon Gardens, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Wickremasinghe leaves behind his wife and two daughters. He was 91 years old.

Alma Hunt, vice president of the Baptist World Alliance from 1970 to 1975, died on Saturday, June 14, in Roanoke, Virginia, in the United States.

Hunt, who presided over some of the sessions of the 13th BWA World Congress in 1975 in Stockholm, Sweden – the first woman to do so, was executive secretary of the Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) from 1948 to 1974, serving 26 years.

Under her leadership, the WMU expanded its mission in the United States and other countries. Membership in the organization grew to 1.5 million women during her tenure. Hunt travelled to more than 90 nations and helped to form Baptist women’s groups in other countries, many of which were modeled after the WMU.

Hunt led the WMU to actively support the formation of the BWA Women’s Department (BWAWD), which took shape during her first year as WMU executive secretary, and she was a founder of the North American Baptist Women’s Union (NABWU), one of the regional bodies of the BWAWD. She was NABWU president from 1964 to 1967.

In 1998, the WMU of Virginia renamed the Virginia Baptist Missions Offering in Hunt’s honor – the Alma Hunt Offering for Virginia Missions – in recognition of “her passionate pursuit of a missional lifestyle.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam lauded Hunt for being a reliable and longstanding supporter of the international church body. “We are thankful for people like her who give so much encouragement to those involved in the worldwide Baptist movement,” the BWA leader said.

She studied for her master’s degree at the prestigious Ivy League school, Columbia University, in New York, and received doctorates from William Jewell College and the University of Richmond.

Funeral services were held at Rosalind Hills Baptist Church in Roanoke on Wednesday, June 18. She was 98 years old.

David T. Shannon, former president of Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts, in the United States, died on Saturday, March 22, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Shannon was the first African American to be president of Andover, the oldest graduate school of theology in the US, founded in 1807. He was an American Baptist Church USA pastor and educator.

The author of several books, including The Old Testament Experience of Faith, attended the Baptist-affiliated Virginia Union University and later served as its president. He earned a Doctor of Ministry degree at Vanderbilt University and a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh.

Shannon, who was a member of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation until 1995, chaired the BWA team in the Baptist-Roman Catholic International Conversations from 1984 to 1988.

Acclaimed as a leader who built bridges, he also won awards for his work in furthering dialogue between the African American and Jewish communities in Atlanta.

Shannon also served as dean of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, dean of faculty for the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, and president of Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina.

He is survived by his wife, Averett, their children, Vernitia, Davine and David Jr., and six grandchildren. A memorial service was held at Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, on March 28.

Shannon was 74 years old.
These were the startling words from a recent speech that made me sit up and take notice:

“The impact of global warming is such that I have no hesitation in describing it as a weapon of mass destruction; if we don’t do anything the climate will hurt everyone.”

Now I am aware if you want to divide the Baptist community, then propose a debate on climate change. We have different ways of interpreting the Bible on the future of the earth; we are polarized in our responses to scientists’ warnings about global warming; some suspect the debate on global warming is a Trojan horse conspiracy for greater control by massive government intervention; others feel helpless and overwhelmed by the avalanche of information.

And meanwhile the poor and dispossessed suffer economically while we enjoy the luxury of debating our position on global warming. Across Africa there are increased droughts and agricultural cycles are disrupted; in Asia, floods and droughts are increasingly unpredictable; throughout Latin America dry spells are increasing and harvests are in decline. For the sake of our needy neighbor we need to sit up and take notice.

The stark warning about global warming was made by a Baptist Christian for whom I have a profound respect. Sir John Houghton is the co-chair of the working group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and a founder member of the International Society for Science and Religion. In 2004 Sir John spoke at an Oxford Conference on climate change to which religious leaders from America were invited, including Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals. Through a speech by Sir John, Cizik felt compelled by the scientific evidence and lobbied American evangelicals to take a stand on climate change, resulting in the Evangelical Climate Initiative (www.christiansandclimate.org).

I have addressed the moral challenge that comes from fellow believers like Houghton, who know far more than I do about the causes of climate change, and I have decided to take some personal responsibility for global warming.

First, I have considered my lifestyle and been online to complete a survey on my carbon footprint. I discovered that my footprint is 13.88 metric tons per year, while the average UK resident’s is 9.4 and in Malawi it less than 0.1 per person. My air flights alone as your president total around 9 metric tons per year, which left me pondering the implications for all of us who travel vast distances to BWA events.

Second, I have meditated on the supremacy of Christ in the great hymn of Colossians 1:10-17. As I reflect on the truth that the entire universe came into being through Christ Jesus (v.16); that He is the great sustainer of everything He has made (v.17); that God’s purpose is through Christ to reconcile all things to himself (20), I ask: If this is the relationship of Christ to the cosmos, how does this define my approach to His creation?

Third, I have studied the Bible to review my theological roots on this matter. I have discovered that in the Bible there are 863 references to the earth (165 in the New Testament), 494 references to heaven and 537 references to love. This exercise is not only a challenge to reflect some of this biblical balance in my sermons, but I have re-discovered the theological, moral and practical arguments which all indicate the appropriateness of urgent action on climate change. They can be summarized as love for God, love for neighbor, and responsible stewardship of the earth’s resources. (See Brian Edgar’s excellent article on evangelicals and climate change in the current edition of Lausanne World Pulse, www.lausanneworldpulse.com).

Fourth, I have noted what other believers are doing to combat global warming and have found inspiration in their practical actions. I applaud the initiative of Australian Baptists in supporting the Earth Hour project. At 8 pm on March 29, 2008, Australian Baptists joined with millions of others around the world in turning off their lights for an hour as a sign of united action against global warming. The Baptist Union of Australia has been persistent in calling for government action to address the adverse environmental effects of global warming and the human suffering and loss resulting from climate change.

The Pew Center on Global Climate Change was established in 1998 “to provide credible information, straight answers and innovative solutions in the effort to address global climate change.”

Credible information, straight answers, innovative solutions.

This sounds very Baptist to me.

I hope we will join the movement.
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