Lotz Receives International Religious Liberty Award

Denton Lotz, former general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), received the International Award for Religious Liberty on Thursday, June 18, in Washington, DC, in the United States.

Lotz, who was named General Secretary Emeritus upon his retirement from the BWA in 2007, was awarded for making “religious freedom a major focus of his ministry as church leader and church statesman,” at the 7th Annual Religious Liberty Dinner, which was sponsored by Liberty magazine, the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), and the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

In his response, Lotz, who is president of the IRLA, stated that the award was recognition of the role that Baptists have played in the defense of religious liberty since the founding of the Baptist movement 400 years ago, in 1609. Baptists, he said, were often persecuted because of their anti-establishment stance and their defense of the liberty of conscience. “Baptists were a persecuted group,” he told the roughly 300 guests gathered in the ballroom of the Capital Hilton hotel in Washington. “We believe that where religious freedom is denied, all other freedoms are denied,” he explained.

Keynote speaker for the dinner was Emanuel Cleaver, II, United States Congressman from Kansas City in the state of Missouri, and co-chair of the International Religious Freedom Caucus in the US Congress. “Religious freedom is a God-given gift, a sacred right,” said Cleaver, an ordained United Methodist Church minister and the first African American elected as mayor of Kansas City. “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, yet persecutions and atrocities are still taking place,” Cleaver stated.

David Saperstein, Jewish rabbi and Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, received the National Award for Religious Liberty. Saperstein was elected the first chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom in 1999, which was created by an act of Congress in 1998. He was recently named to the White House Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Alan Reinach, Director of the Church State Council and President of the North American Religious Liberty Association-West, received the A.T. Jones Medal for representing employees who have suffered religious discrimination.

Below: Denton Lotz receives the International Award for Religious Liberty from John Graz. Secretary-General of the International Religious Liberty Association.
23 400 Years of Baptist Mission
It is not surprising that new missionary models are being pioneered by Baptists around the world today. David Kerrigan notes our continuing missionary commitment as he recounts the rich history of Baptist mission.

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28 British Baptists Urged to Recapture a Passion for the World’s Needy
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COVER PHOTO
Two men pray together at the 6th UBLA Assembly and Congress in Lima, Peru, in April

Unless otherwise noted, photos in the issue are by BWA staff.
During this significant year, when Baptists are celebrating their 400th year of witness, several outstanding publications are marking the occasion.

William Brackney was ahead of the game, producing *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought with special reference to Baptists in Britain and North America* [Mercer, 2004]. In a publication of nearly 600 pages, Brackney begins by tackling “the problem of Baptist theology” and proceeds to trace features of this theology in confessions, hymns, and the spoken and written words of Baptist pastors and teachers. He examines publications by a range of Baptist writers in Britain, Canada and the United States. Of interest is the inclusion in Brackney’s work of insights from what he terms “African American Baptist Traditions.”

Students of Baptist thought will turn to Brackney’s work again and again for immersion into the rich and varied wells that dot the variable landscape of the Baptist tradition.

James Leo Garrett has offered *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* [Mercer, 2009]. A work of monumental proportions, the book of more than 700 pages is “a study of the doctrinal beliefs of the people called Baptists.” Relying on published sources, including books of sermons, the text surveys the doctrinal beliefs of Baptist authors and those who have analyzed their work. It also includes an exposé of Baptist confessions of faith.

Drawing on years of careful research, Garrett has provided a work that will grace the library stacks of Baptist seminaries for many years to come. It is an invaluable guide for students of Baptist doctrine especially in countries of the North Atlantic. Garrett has to be commended for collaborating with others to devote almost 50 pages to the thought of Baptists in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He thereby begins to reflect awareness of the growth of the Baptist movement in the southern hemisphere. Also encouraging is the inclusion of analysis of such outstanding contemporary Baptist theologians as Paul Fiddes, Timothy George and Nigel Wright.

It was not the Baptist quadricentennial that inspired the final publication to which we now turn. It was, instead, the achievement of 80 years of age by outstanding Asian Baptist theologian Lien-Hwa Chow that led the Asia Baptist Graduate School of Theology (ABGST) to present this festschrift to its first Asian president. *Take Roots Downward, Bear Fruit Upward* [ABGST, 2009] is edited by Johnson T. K. Lim.

The book’s 27 chapters cover a wide range of subjects and its authors are mostly Asian. In most cases, the book reflects a dialogue between Asian and Western perspectives in theology. Its subject matter includes issues related to Bible and hermeneutics, gender and ecology. Authors include Lilian Hui-Kiau Lim, ABGTS President, Joyce Abugan, President of the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Sunny Boon Sang Tan, Dean of the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, and other leading Baptist theologians and biblical scholars in Asia.

If some publications this year will treat with what has been happening in the Baptist theological traditions, especially in the northern hemisphere, *Taking Root* offers a snapshot of what the future direction of Baptist thought might be like.

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

**Gifts to the Baptist World Alliance in memory of Imogene Stevens were given by:**

- Arlene Wilson
- Winifred J. Clinton
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**Gifts to the Baptist World Alliance in honor of Dr. J. Langley was given by:**

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FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY
Neville Callam

Marking the Baptist Quadricentennial

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**FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

Neville Callam
Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), has sent grants totaling US$12,000 for cyclone emergency relief to Bangladesh and India.

Cyclone Aila affected southern Bangladesh and eastern India on Monday, May 25, and has claimed approximately 330 lives.

“Our team visited the area and found the present need is drinking water and dry food,” said Leor Sarkar, general secretary of the Bangladesh Baptist Fellowship. “All the water wells are under water or are mixed with saline water and there is no source of sweet water as the salt water covered the whole area,” Sarkar reported. “We’re now distributing drinking water and food to save their lives.” A number of persons, he said, are living on boats.

Sarkar, who is a member of the BWA Commission on Church Leadership and the Promotion and Development Committee, informed the BWA that 27 Baptist churches “in Khulna, Bagherhat, Satkhira, Noakhali and Laxmipur districts have been affected by this disaster.”

Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha, through its Social Health and Education Development (SHED) Board, reported that “wind-driven tidal surge caused by the cyclone damaged a number of flood control embankments in different districts.” Philip Halder, Director of SHED, told the BWA that several thousand houses were washed away by seawater, and more than 15,000 persons in eight villages have been marooned.

The US$7,000 sent by BWAid to SHED will be used to purchase food items for approximately 2,000 families in Bagherhat, Khulna and Potuakhali districts.

Nirmal Sapui, general secretary for the Bengal Baptist Union (BBU) in India, told BWAid Director Paul Montacute that the cyclone severely affected the Sunderban area, the world’s largest mangrove forest, along the India-Bangladesh border.

Some 700 villages in India were affected by the cyclone, destroying 6,000 houses and damaging 8,000 more. “Thousands and thousands of animals died,” said Sapui, who is a member of the BWA General Council and the Christian Education Workgroup. Both agricultural and aquaculture enterprises will be affected for up to a year, he stated. The BBU received US$5,000 from BWAid.

The same general area was affected by Cyclone Sidr in 2007, killing approximately 3,500 persons.

The Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention (KABC) in the North East Indian state of Assam celebrated the 150th anniversary of the founding of Baptist witness in the region from March 21-22.

Approximately 5,000 worshippers attended the meetings at the Tika Baptist Church, the site of the first Christian mission station and the first church built in Karbi Anglong, which, “in the early days, was the center of mission and evangelism, education and literature for the people of Karbi Anglong.”

Held under the theme, “In His Footstep,” Karbi Baptists celebrated the work of early American missionaries such as Pitt and Jessie Moore, John and Laura Carvel, and William and Elsie Hutton among the Karbi people. “A light began to dawn in the verdant hills of Karbi Anglong when more than a hundred and fifty years ago Miles Bronson and his companion William Ward made a historic evangelical expedition into the region,” read Daybreak in the Hills, a souvenir book published to mark the occasion.

Worship services, a jubilee dinner, a fireworks display and dedication of plaques and other objects were among the major highlights of the anniversary celebration. The main speaker was Dusanu Venyo, mission secretary for the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India.

KABC was founded in 1980 when churches in Karbi Anglong formed their own convention, after previously being part of the Assam Baptist Convention. KABC, which is divided into 12 associations, now has more than 23,000 members and more than 280 churches.

Flood-affected people move to safer places after receiving relief supplies on the outskirts of Siliguri in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, May 26, 2009.
With the rainy season now upon the country, the nets will save more than 5,000 people from dying from this preventable disease. It is expected that if used properly, the nets are indeed a weapon to fight against malaria. Consistently sleeping under an LLIN can decrease severe malaria by 45 percent, reduce premature births by 42 percent, and reduce all causes of child mortality by 17 to 63 percent.

It is no wonder why many see the net distribution as a gift from God. The partnership that Brickson Sam and the youth leaders of the All Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship have with HIS Nets is commendable and worth emulating as it demonstrates what true discipleship is all about, caring for the least of these.

The most recent country to benefit from the partnership between HIS Nets and the All Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship is Cameroon. Brickson and the youth leaders from the three Baptist bodies in Cameroon (Cameroon Baptist Convention, Native Baptist Convention and Union of Baptist Churches) came together to assist in the net distribution.

Despite the bad road conditions, the team was able to reach people in remote villages in all four regions of the country with a total distribution of 2,000 insecticide-treated mosquito nets. The nets were distributed to families with small children, clinics, health centers, churches, hospitals and orphanages.

The distribution was a good opportunity to speak openly about the driving force behind this project — the Good News of the Gospel.

The team was received with dancing and great jubilation by all. In some parts of the country, the day of the net distribution was declared a public holiday. In some cases, the distribution was covered live on national television and in other news outlets.

One of the traditional leaders said that the nets “are indeed a weapon to fight against malaria.” It is expected that if used properly, these nets will save more than 5,000 people from dying from this preventable disease. With the rainy season now upon the country, the nets could not have come at a better time.

The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that malaria is one of the most severe public health problems worldwide. It is a leading cause of death and disease in many developing countries, where young children and pregnant women are the groups most affected. According to the World Health Organization, at least one million deaths occur every year with some 3.2 billion people living in areas at risk of malaria transmission in 107 countries and territories.

According to the United States Agency for International Development, long-lasting, insecticide-treated bed nets (LLNIs), the type of nets distributed by HIS Nets, “have proven highly effective in killing the mosquitoes that transmit malaria. In addition, the netting also acts as a protective barrier, helping to prevent the mosquito from biting. Consistently sleeping under an LLIN can decrease severe malaria by 45 percent, reduce premature births by 42 percent, and reduce all causes of child mortality by 17 to 63 percent.”

The ministry of HIS Nets was started in 2004 by Frank T. Thomas and his family. While serving as a missionary in Africa, Frank’s daughter had a near-death experience after contracting malaria and he took up the challenge to help alleviate this deadly disease. Over the last four years, this ministry has provided more than 30,000 nets.

Emmett Dunn, Director of the BWA Youth Department, contributed to this story.
Meego Remmel, president of the Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia (UFEBCE), visited the offices of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) on June 4.

Remmel met with BWA General Secretary Neville Callam and updated him on the work of Baptists in Estonia, a Baltic state that became independent after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Baptists, he said, are not the biggest church in Estonia, a highly secular society where only 10 percent go to church, but “Baptists are perhaps the strongest overall in attendance, structure, and lay ministry activities.”

The strongest area of ministry for Baptists is youth work, Remmel said. “The church is made up of old and young people. There are not many middle-aged persons due to the effect of the communist era.” Young people, he explained, are responding to the Gospel because of its relevance to their lives.

The UFEBCE operates a crisis pregnancy center with crisis counselors to address the high levels of abortion among the young in his country. This is run in collaboration with the government “and is well received by Estonian society,” he said.

Due to a high unemployment rate of 15 percent, and a 15-16 percent decline in the Estonian economy, the UFEBCE has held a series of weekly seminars for persons who have lost their jobs. Participants receive a certificate to show their participation.

A celebration is planned for July to mark the 125th anniversary of the founding of Baptist witness in the country of 1.3 million people. In 1884, 15 persons were baptized, at night, through a hole broken through the ice. This marked the beginning of Baptist work in Estonia. The baptizer was a German-speaking pastor from St. Petersburg, Russia. More than 1,000 persons are expected to attend the July celebrations.

A recent boost to the relatively small Christian community in Estonia was the Franklin Graham Festival of Hope that was held from May 29-31. The festival included the participation of several Christian church traditions, including the Baptists, who were involved in organizing and planning the event. An estimated 30,000 persons attended these meetings, the largest ever Christian gathering in the former Soviet Republic, and some 1,000 came to faith.

The UFEBCE has both Estonian- and Russian-speaking congregations, and a newly established English-speaking church. There are now 83 churches in the Estonian union with 6,000 members.

Ukraine

Callam visits Ukraine

Left: A youth celebration event in Kiev at which Callam brought greetings
Right: Callam preaching at Central Baptist Church in Kiev

make and execute evangelism plans. In this way, the evangelism work in the country is well organized and coordinated as there is a “clearly defined focus of work.”

Callam observed that there was “high church attendance and professionalization of the music ministry” at the worship services and the AUCECB events in which he participated.

While in Ukraine, Callam toured the construction site of the largest Baptist church in Kiev. Callam also visited with Oleksandr Turchynov, a Baptist layman and the First Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine. Callam commended Turchynov, who was Acting Prime Minister as the nation’s Prime Minister was out of the country at the time, on the level of religious freedom that is enjoyed in the country. Callam also met with Pavlo Unguyran, a member of the Ukrainian parliament who is chair of the Euro-Asian Baptist Federation Youth Committee.

Ukraine has one of the largest Baptist memberships in Europe. The AUCECB has more than 2,800 churches and church plants and more than 135,000 members. The Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches and Ministries of Ukraine has approximately 130 churches and more than 11,000 baptized believers.
The North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF) has established a Disaster Relief Network.

The network, which is still in the process of development, brings member bodies of the NABF together to offer assistance in instances where disasters occur.

Comprising several Baptist groups in the United States and Canada, such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and Canadian Baptist Ministries, the new initiative aims to encourage NABF members to commit resources to effect disaster relief “without infringing on the mission or autonomy of each.”

Recent disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and fires in California in 2008 and 2009 were catalysts in leading the various Baptist groups to cooperate and share in disaster planning, as well as in response and recovery efforts.

One aim of the network is to avoid duplication in disaster response situations. “The ultimate purposes of the NABF Disaster Response Network are to help those who experience disaster to recover more quickly and effectively and to promote good stewardship by reducing the risk of duplication of efforts and resources,” the purpose document states.

But the network is not a disaster response organization. Rather, “it is intended to be a dynamic networking of its member organizations to enhance these bodies to be more effective responding organizations.” It will not infringe on the autonomy of each member body to respond to disasters as it sees fit.

It will, however, provide “early responders” to disaster areas who are able to “move into the affected location as quickly as possible after the area has been stabilized and made safe” by “first responders” such as firefighters, search and rescue teams, law enforcement officers, and utility company personnel. These early responders would assist in providing meals and clean water to victims, and do recovery and cleanup operations.

It is envisioned that the network will enable the NABF, one of six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance, to more effectively match volunteers and resources to the level of needs in the aftermath of a disaster, as well as to offer training and the sharing of expertise among the various Baptist church organizations.

Four meetings of the network have been held thus far, the last of which was on May 6-7 in the state of Virginia in the United States. The next meeting is scheduled for November in Toronto, Canada.

Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey met with the Minister of Religious Affairs for the government of Cuba in Havana in February.

Coffey, who attended the annual assembly of the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba (BCWC), discussed with the minister the BWA’s plans to hold a Living Water evangelism and leadership training conference in the Caribbean island of 11 million people. The conference is expected to take place in Havana in early 2010.

During the meeting, which was also attended by Baptist leaders in Cuba, the minister expressed appreciation to Cuban Baptists for assistance offered to victims of several hurricanes that affected the island in 2008. Several major hurricanes landed on Cuba during that year, including Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

Coffey also shared in a rare joint meeting between the leaders from the four Baptist conventions on the island, the BCWC, the Baptist Convention of Eastern Cuba, the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba, and the Free Baptist Convention of Cuba. Some 30 leaders attended the meeting.

Coffey preached during the celebratory service of the 2009 assembly of the BCWC marking the convention’s 100th anniversary. Two of the deputies of the religious affairs minister attended the worship celebration.
More than 15,000 worshippers attended a service of evangelism at a stadium in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam on Tuesday, April 21.

An Quoc Nguyen, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Ho Chi Minh City, described the event as “a Spiritual Tsunami,” with inspirational worship, preaching, prayer and healing. “About 1,500 people were converted or healed,” Nguyen said.

The event, which involved the participation of about 50 largely unregistered house churches from various church denominations, including Baptists, was part of the Easter celebration of Christians in the country.

The worship service at the Tao Dan Stadium was described as a rare event in Vietnam. “The only other such event granted to unregistered groups was an open-air meeting during Christmas of 2007,” the Compass Direct website reported.

Baptist leaders of Sri Lankan Baptist Sangamaya (SLBS) visited a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the South Asian country in the wake of the war between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or Tamil Tigers.

The visit to temporary shelters in Vavuniya, a town in Northern Province, occurred on May 11 and 12, and included the distribution of supplies to approximately 500 families by the SLBS. These supplies, which included water, milk and footwear, were purchased with a grant of US$5,000 from Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance.

E.K. Yasaratne, General Secretary of SLBS, who joined other religious leaders on the tour of the camp, informed the BWA that the relief coordinator for the IDP camp requested additional supplies such as gripe water, soap, towels, disinfectors, milk bottles and mosquito nets that are “useful for baby care, as many children were handicapped.” An attempt is being made “to find a mechanism to supply the above items requested by the coordinating officer” as soon as possible to be sent to the camp, he said, and appeals are being made to “churches and well-wishers” for further assistance.

More than 270,000 IDPs, mainly Tamil, are in camps in Northern Province following the escalation of the civil war in the country between the LTTE and the government over the past few months. The civil war first erupted in 1983 as the Tamils, who accuse the Sinhalese government of discrimination, fought for an independent state in the north and east of the island. Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 80,000 persons have been killed. An estimated 7,000 civilians have been killed and approximately 17,000 have been wounded since January 2009.

Reports are that the LTTE forces have been defeated, and that founder and leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, who founded the rebel group in 1976, was killed on May 18.

Yasaratne said, “We pray that the Good Lord will take care of the refugees and settle them in permanent shelters to begin a new life free from terrorism.”
Baptist World Magazine

Swedish Baptists, Other Churches, to Merge

The Baptist Union of Sweden (BUS) is considering a proposal that would unite the BUS in a formal relationship with the United Methodist Church of Sweden and the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden.

The move to formalize a relationship between denominations at the national level is an outgrowth of what has been taking place in local churches in Sweden for many years, explained Doris Bernhardson, former home mission secretary for the BUS, who visited the Baptist World Alliance Center in Falls Church, Virginia, on April 16.

Traditionally 75% of the population in Sweden is Lutheran, although only 5% attend church, and churches of other denominations are small. A large number of local churches regularly work together to minister in their communities. According to Bernhardson, more than 50 percent of churches in Sweden belong to more than one denominational group.

“By ourselves we are a weak voice. We need one another,” she said.

Some collaboration between the Baptist, Methodist, and Covenant churches at the national level already exists. The governing bodies of the groups still meet individually, but the general secretaries meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern and to pray together. The Baptist youth from each church body formed a joint organization, Equmenia, in 2007. Baptists and the Covenant church have had a theological college and a theological magazine together for many years. The Methodists recently became a part of the college as well.

“We must find ways to reach people with the gospel. We do that better when we work together,” said Bernhardson.

Although there are doctrinal differences between the three groups, Bernhardson said the groups “have more in common than differences because we have Jesus.” She says the move for unification is not only because of concerns about the size and influence of the churches individually, but is an effort to be obedient to Jesus’ prayer in John 17, “that they all may be one.”

The three church bodies held their annual assemblies in May and each voted to proceed with discussions to formalize a relationship. The three groups will hold a joint assembly next year to continue the process.

The BUS comprises 217 churches and 17,545 members. The BUS was the first free union in Sweden, formed in 1848 when no religious groups apart from the Lutheran State Church were permitted in the country.

United States

BWA Director Paul Montacute Ordained

Paul Montacute, Director of Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, was ordained to the Christian ministry on May 31.

Montacute, a Briton, has had a long association with the BWA, beginning in 1963 when he attended the Baptist Youth World Conference in Beirut, Lebanon. He served as chair of the BWA Youth Executive Committee from 1985-1988, and joined the staff of the BWA in 1990 as the director responsible for finance, youth, and BWAid.

With the expansive role of BWAid in the life of Baptists around the world, Montacute took on that sole portfolio in 1994.

Montacute has been involved in full-time Christian vocation for much of his adult life, first becoming a youth minister for the Boys’ Brigade in 1972. He served in this capacity for several years in Cardiff, Wales, and then for two years in various locations in Canada.

After working in an ecumenical parish as a youth minister in England, he joined the staff of the Baptist Union of Great Britain as national youth officer, serving in that position for eight years before joining the BWA staff in 1990.

Montacute described his ordination as “recognition of the ministry that I’ve been involved with over the past 37 years.”

Several BWA standing committee members and staff, including General Secretary Neville Callam, joined the congregation in celebration of Montacute’s ordination at Vienna Baptist Church in Virginia on Pentecost Sunday. Callam, who delivered the sermon, said Montacute “has been involved in the sort of proclamation that has especially strong currency in a world that has grown tired of words, though not of enacted speech.”

Montacute will now continue in Christian ministry “not merely as a personal contribution by an individual who wants to serve God,” but as “a servant who ministers on behalf of the church through which the triune God ordains him,” Callam said.

In his sermon, Callam noted the link between Pentecost and ordination in “the work of the Holy Spirit in gifting the church for its mission to the world in the name of Christ.”

The prayer of ordination was offered by Fausto Vasconcelos, BWA Director for Education & Evangelism and Study & Research, and Lee Hickman, Assistant to the Director of BWAid, read scripture.
The 4th Global Baptist Peace Conference was held in Rome, Italy, from February 9-14.

More than 350 participants from 59 nations took part in the six-day conference “to teach and preach, learn and live, the commitment to peace-building and justice-making that is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

The conference program included worship, the sharing of stories of violence and peacemaking, a silent peace demonstration, intensive training sessions on topics such as “Intercultural Conflict and Peace-Building” and “Building a Theology of Peace,” and more than 40 workshops on issues such as “Human Trafficking and War,” “The Nonviolent Teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” and “Civil-Military Relations in Humanitarian Crises: The African Experience.”

At the conclusion of the conference, participants made 10 declarations, including a “commitment to the role of the United Nations in resolving national and international disputes” and a “commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

The group stated their recognition of “the reality of conflict between peoples of different faith” and committed “to deepen mutual understanding and dialogue in a spirit of peace and goodwill.” They also acknowledged “the reality of poverty and oppression” and committed “to challenging the unjust social and economic structures that perpetuate inequality and destroy life.”

Those gathered promised to “seek God’s kingdom” by caring for and working to end discrimination against children and women. They also pledged to “follow the way of peace” by “listening to the voices of the marginalized, including those who are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.”

Previous Baptist peace conferences were held in Sweden, Nicaragua, and Australia.

The Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBSC) in the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand celebrated its 25th anniversary from March 25-29.

The school was founded by Saw Simon, the recipient of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Human Rights Award in 2000, and offers general education to refugees and training to church leaders.

Simon and his family fled across the Thai border after the school, which was originally located in Rangoon (Yangon), the former capital of Myanmar, was destroyed.

He later restarted it at the Mae La camp. Mae La houses an estimated 50,000 persons and is one of the largest of several refugee camps for displaced persons from Myanmar who fled conflicts in the South Asian country. The school restarted with 32 students and has since grown in enrollment to more than 300.

Included in the celebration were the 23rd graduation exercises of the KKBBSC, where 39 students graduated, and the 25th Annual Mass Meeting of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Churches (KKBC), comprising the more than 240 churches that were founded in the refugee camps.

“We are really grateful to God for what He has done for us, is doing for us, and will be doing for us,” a release from the school said. “We also thank our brothers and sisters around the world for supporting us and praying for us.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam congratulated the school on the significant milestone. “We want to congratulate the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College on your Silver Jubilee,” Callam wrote to Simon. “It is a joy and blessing to know you have been ministering, teaching and equipping people for the ministry for 25 years in such a challenging situation. We are inspired by your courage and your faithfulness.”

More than 2,000 internally displaced pastors, leaders, evangelists, and members of the KKBC attended the various events that were held.
Baptists in Latin America are experiencing a spurt in growth. The Brazilian Baptist Convention grew by almost 100,000 new members and more than 450 new churches between 2003 and 2006. The Convention of Baptist Churches in Guatemala had some 36,000 members in 2007 and now reports 50,000 members in 2009. And the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Chile (UEBC) had 326 churches and just under 28,000 members in 2007. One year later, in 2008, that convention reported that it had 500 churches and 35,000 members.

Such phenomenal growth is part of a broader trend in the growth of Evangelical Christianity in South and Central America. For instance, the number of Protestants in Guatemala increased from 25 percent to 40 percent of the population in Guatemala between 2003 and 2005; in Nicaragua, Protestants numbered almost 17 percent in 2005 as against 10 percent in 2003; and in Paraguay, Protestants were three percent of the population in 2003 and 10 percent in 2005. It is estimated that 8,000 new Evangelical Christians are added everyday in Latin America.

It was within this context of growth that the 6th Assembly and Congress of the Union of Baptists in Latin America, the Baptist regional body for South and Central America, was held from April 22-25 in Lima, the capital of Peru. Some 70 voting delegates from most of the countries in Latin America were represented, a much larger representation of delegates than at the last congress and assembly in Cali, Columbia, in 2004.

Other persons joined delegates at workshops held during the day on issues such as ecology and Christian responsibility, religious liberty in Latin America, and immigration and the spreading of the gospel. Hundreds more came out for the night meetings to join in worship celebrations that featured speakers such as Baptist
World Alliance President David Coffey and General Secretary Neville Callam.

A lively debate surrounded an amendment to the UBLA constitution bylaws having to do with membership within UBLA. Should membership be extended to church bodies that are outside of the region? Should language and culture help to determine membership, or should membership be determined only by geography, as has been the case all along? In the end, delegates voted to allow membership based on language and affinity, thus making it possible for Baptist groups in other countries such as the United States and Canada to become members of UBLA.

Three Baptist groups were voted into membership during the meetings – the Association of Baptists of Argentina, the Eastern Baptist Convention of Cuba, and the Baptists United in Christ in Paraguay.

Another important exercise was the election of the new executive to lead UBLA, one of six regional bodies of the BWA, over the next three years. Ivan Martinez of Venezuela was elected president, succeeding Raquel Contreras of Chile, who was elected in 2007 after the resignation of Otto Arango. Contreras, who is a BWA vice president and president for the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile, had declined several requests for her to continue to lead the BWA regional body.

Other persons elected to serve with Martinez on UBLA’s executive are Jacome Parrish from Ecuador, vice president; Andres Gonzalez from Argentina, recording secretary; and Pepe Flores from Peru, member at large. Division leaders are Osvaldo Simari of Paraguay for evangelism; mission director Elvio Marquez, also from Paraguay; and Fanny Merchán of Ecuador for communications. Alberto Prokopchuk of Argentina will continue as UBLA General Secretary and BWA Regional Secretary for Latin America.

Several reports highlighted some of the work being undertaken in Latin America that may give hint to the (Continued on next page)
reasons for the church’s phenomenal growth in the region. Roberto Lugo of Paraguay, president of Baptist Youth of Latin America (JUBLA), highlighted the work of the mission enterprise, Volunteers Without Borders, or “Radical Latin America,” a program to reach and recruit youth for mission.

Started in 2006, the program has so far offered missionary experience for more than 80 youth from countries such as Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay and Peru. The program, which lasts for up to 11 months in each year, places youth and young adults in various locales, usually to work with a weak congregation, and, in a few instances, to help in planting a new church. These “radicals” also help to develop programs within communities such as in sports and health; teach music and languages; and provide training to women.

Jointly run by JUBLA and UBLA’s mission department, the former doing the identifying and recruiting and the latter the training and placement of the volunteers, Volunteers Without Borders recruits persons between 19 and 33 years old.

Maryinkellison Wanderley of Brazil, outgoing director of mission for UBLA, stated that, as a direct result of this mission initiative, which started in Brazil and was later adopted by the rest of Latin America, more than 28,000 persons were evangelized, more than 4,500 decisions were made for Christ, and almost 1,400 persons were brought into a discipleship program.

Brazil has had such a mission outreach initiative for some time, run by the World Mission Board of the Brazilian Baptist Convention. It has had the involvement of more than 160 Brazilian volunteers, with two initiatives geared specifically for Africa: “Luzo Africano” for Portuguese-speaking countries such as Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau and the “African Radicals” for other African countries such as Senegal and Niger.

Other countries such as Ecuador and Peru have developed their own “radical” initiatives, usually started by youth from those countries that participated in the UBLA program and who returned to their home country after their service is complete.

The aim, said Lugo, is to “mobilize youth to have a vision for mission and evangelism, improve fellowship among Latin American youth, equip youth in their personal life, and to make an impact on Latin American life and society.”

An initiative of the evangelism department of UBLA is the “Life in Jesus” campaign, which targeted Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and several other countries. One feature of this exercise has been to provide clean water to communities where new churches have been planted and where other forms of ministries have been established. The provision of potable water is intended as a practical demonstration to these communities that “Jesus Christ is the Living Water.” In San Pedro, Paraguay, a well was dug and connected to an existing 50,000 liter (13,000 gallon) tank (see story on next page).

Latin America is at the cutting edge of Baptist faith and witness, and is helping to lead the way in evangelism and mission. The fruits of such endeavors are evidenced by the increase in membership, and the greater level of presence that Baptists have in the region.
The Baptist Church, “Jesucristo oú Jevyta,” (“Jesus Christ will come again” in the Guaraní language), from the remote area of Guavirá, in Paraguay, is leading an initiative to profoundly impact their community in Christ’s name.

This local congregation, in cooperation with the Baptist Church of Villa Morra, from Asunción (Paraguay), and the Department of Evangelism of UBLA, facilitated and directed the construction of an artesian well, which, from now on, will show the love of Christ in a real way to the community.

The community of Guavirá, located in the San Pedro jurisdiction (the poorest in Paraguay), had serious problems in accessing water. The community had an artesian well connected to an elevated water tank provided through a government initiative. However, the well was not deep enough and was located in a sandy area. Moreover, the pump of the well had a constant mechanical problem. All of this translated into a frequent shortage of drinking water, which made it necessary for people to use water from a nearby river that was not suitable for human consumption.

Faced with this problem, the Baptist Church of Guavirá contacted the Baptist Church of Villa Morra, from Asunción (Paraguay), and the Department of Evangelism of UBLA. The Department of Evangelism made the appropriate contacts and provided advice to the small community of local believers so they were able to raise the necessary funds for the drilling of the well. They received generous contributions from Christian organizations that helped to make this initiative a reality.

The local church had significant cooperation in their effort to impact their community with the Gospel. A member of the church gave his own land to be used for the drilling. Others contributed with their labor or donated construction material for the well.

The drilling was conducted at a depth of about 100 meters (109 yards) with a special pipe. The water produced is of excellent quality. In addition, an electric water pump was installed with a corresponding control panel. The new well was connected to the old water tank of 50,000 liters of capacity. The pumping capacity is now 6,000 liters per hour. The water provided will benefit well over 160 families in the area.

On Sunday, May 3, the well was handed over to members of the Guavirá Neighborhood Commission in an emotional ceremony that emphasized the figure of Jesus Christ, the Living

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Water. Neighborhood representatives appreciated the gesture, and agreed to take responsibility for the care of the well, to maintain it and preserve it.

We thank God for the generosity of the people who made it possible to realize this project.

Eduardo Sánchez is a member of Villa Mora Baptist Church in Asuncion, Paraguay, and an Assistant to Osvaldo Simari, UBLA Director of Evangelism.
He is the son of missionaries and, for the past several years, has been a missionary for the Brazilian Baptist Convention. Though still relatively young, his life has taken various unexpected turns.

Marcos Andre Pena Ramos was, for several years, a drug addict – imbibing crack cocaine, cocaine mixed with kerosene, marijuana, alcohol, cigarettes, etc. He became hooked while only 13 years old when, according to him, young girls close to his age introduced him to drugs while attending a party in Arequipa, the city of 1.2 million in southern Peru where his parents served as Brazilian missionaries.

According to Ramos, Arequipa has one of the highest incidences of drug addiction in Peru, and perhaps in Latin America. It is estimated that 100,000 adult women – those 18 and over – are addicts. The figures for young girls 17 and under are not known, but Ramos estimates, based on his knowledge and experience, that the numbers are very high.

The reasons for such high addiction? Drugs are cheap, as little as 30 American cents for a shot of cocaine, and lots of parties are held where drugs are easily available and accessible. “It is easy to get and use drugs,” Ramos said.

His road to recovery was not easy. By the time he was 17, he was in rehab for the third time. In desperation, his parents decided to move back home to Brazil to help their young son, but were persuaded by Brazilian missionary leaders to stay in Peru and instead send him to Brazil.

Ramos was in rehab for two years where he went through a comprehensive recovery program. Part of that recovery was a commitment of his life to Christ, and, it was while in rehab that he felt the call of God on his life to work with other persons struggling with drug addiction.

The result of that sense of call is the formation of a drug rehabilitation clinic in Arequipa. He took on this arduous challenge when only 19 years old, right out of rehab. The young man, now 26 and claiming to be fully recovered from his addictions, said he felt the need to make some kind of restitution, to help make right some of the wrongs that he did. He is helping others, he said, because while he was an addict, he inveigled others into the lifestyle.

It was for that reason he returned to Arequipa. He identified a three story building and, with the help of his father, was able to rent the property, using their personal finances and other funds that they were able to raise on their own. After six months, Waldemiro Tymchak, the late executive director of the World Mission Board (WMB) of the Brazilian Baptist Convention, his parents’ direct employers, gave enthusiastic support by allowing the mission board to assist with the payment of rent.

After one year, the program needed more space. A tract of land of 25,000 square meters, or roughly six acres, was identified. Although the land was going for only US$1 per square meter, there were no funds to make the purchase.

Fortuitously, Ramos, at 21, had returned to Brazil to attend South Brazil Baptist Theological Seminary in Rio de Janeiro, completing the

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four-year bachelor degree program in two years. It was while there that he spoke about the drug rehab clinic at a Brazilian Baptist Convention meeting, and of the desire to purchase the six-acre property. One Brazilian businessman in the audience was moved by Ramos’ story and decided to purchase the property on the behalf of the rehab clinic.

The clinic, which is a facility for males, currently has 30 residents and has helped approximately 300 addicts since its inception, with an average of 50 per year. Each resident goes through a 10-month, four-stage program designed to wean the addict off drugs. This includes an adaptation or adjustment stage which lasts for 30 days; three months of psychotherapy, which is incorporated with prayer, Bible reading, and instructions in the Christian faith; another three months of leadership and development training, as well as involvement within a local church; and finally, reinstatement into society where the person returns to his community and family in order to be re-socialized, and where the person may be given assistance to continue school or find employment. This final step should last 90 days.

There are successes. Several have experienced full recovery, 20 have been baptized over the past six years, and 10 have been or are going through formal theological training.

But the failure rate can also be high. Only about 20 percent usually have full recovery. Of every 30 residents, about three or four may experience recovery at the first try. For those who relapse and return to the facility a second time, another two or three out of 30 may recover.

Ramos claims that these figures are similar to other drug rehab programs. The failure rate, he said, is often due to a lack of commitment on the part of the addict, and though he recognizes that some cannot be helped, he said the center always has an open door.

Ramos is particularly pleased about the spiritual dimension of the program. In one small Baptist church, he estimated that 50 percent of those who attend are family members of addicts who have been through the program.

But the clinic has an uncertain future. Its status with the Brazilian World Mission Board is yet to be determined, especially since the death of Tymchak in April 2007. Tymchak, who headed the Brazilian mission body from 1979 until his death, ensured that the project had the financial support of the World Mission Board. Since his passing, no financial support has been forthcoming, except for Ramos’ salary. Moreover, the question has been raised as to whether the clinic should be passed over to the Baptist Evangelical Convention of Peru, but it is unclear whether the Peruvian convention would be able to financially sustain the program.

It is because of these developments that attempts are being made to make the clinic self-sustaining. The center charges a fee, but a number of the residents are unable to meet the cost. The Baptist World Alliance, through Baptist World Aid, has provided 100 percent funding for the construction of a chicken farm with the hope that the farm will help to defray the cost of those who are unable to pay the clinic’s fee.

Volunteers keep the center going. Two pastors, one social worker, a physician and a psychologist all donate their time, free of cost. Three other volunteers, who themselves were helped by the clinic to recover from drug addiction, offer their services for free, in return for living at the center without charge.

The dream of Ramos, married since November 2008 to a student studying psychiatry, is that this drug rehab clinic would become a model that can be replicated in other countries. He claimed it was a dream also shared by Tymchak, and it is a hope that Ramos still holds to firmly.
It was one of the worst natural disasters to affect Peru in recent times. The 8.0 magnitude earthquake struck the coastal areas of the South American country, near the city of Pisco, on August 15, 2007.

Hundreds were killed, and tens of thousands were left homeless. Many persons still suffer the consequences of the monster tremor, which lasted for some three minutes. People still live under tarpaulins, waterproofed but often flimsy canvases that can only be regarded as the most temporary form of shelter.

Yet, it was the earthquake that opened the eyes of the Peruvian public to the presence of Baptists in their midst. According to Pepe Flores, president of the Baptist Evangelical Convention of Peru (BECP), “The earthquake was a blessing as it united the convention.”

This unity came through united action to minister to and reach out to the victims of the earthquake, which affected not only the city of Pisco, but also Ica, Chincha Alta, San Vicente de Cañete, and was felt in cities farther away, including Lima, Peru’s capital city.

Through their own means and from donations, which included a contribution of US$20,000 from Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, the convention is able to, among other things, rebuild houses for families left devastated in the earthquake zones. An agreement has been struck with the Peruvian government whereby the convention will use funds to construct houses, have the funds reimbursed by the government, and then use these funds to construct other houses. Currently, eight houses are under construction. The need is great, for, according to Flores, 98 percent of the houses in Pisco, or some 76,000 dwellings, were destroyed.

The ministry offered by Baptists in the seat of the ancient Inca Empire has led to greater recognition from the public and greater respect for Baptists. “The support of the Baptist family after the quake was highly

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regarded by other churches and political leaders,” the
convention leader said, while thanking the BWA and Baptists
from Argentina, Spain, the United States and other countries
for their contributions.

The ministry in the earthquake zones also opened up
opportunities for church planting and other forms of mission
endeavors. Whereas there was only one church and two
missions in the affected areas before the quake, there are
now 12 missions or church plants that are expected to become
churches sometime in the future.

The support of the Baptist family after the
quake has led to greater respect for Baptists

The lesson of ministering to earthquake victims has
spurred relief efforts in other areas and instances. Baptists
are working in northern Peru, which was affected by flooding,
offering relief supplies and clothing to affected families.
There is now an evangelism program for preschool children
who live in poverty-stricken areas, as well as an outreach
ministry to communities to counter child abuse.

There is a special emphasis on the Amazon region of the
country, which, following Brazil, has the next largest share
of the famous Amazon rainforest. The effort is spurred by the
fact that there are only five trained pastors in the Amazon area,
as most pastors are concentrated in the coastal areas of Peru.
An institute is being established this year with the specific
intent to train pastors to work with people in the Amazon,
particularly in ecology and the environment and in education.
The program is oversubscribed, with approximately 150
persons on the waiting list. The aim is to train 400 persons
in the next three years to work in the mountains and jungles
of the Amazon.

According to Flores, this is new to the BECP. Involvement
in social ministry “was almost totally neglected” by Baptists
in Peru, he said, but with the earthquake, “the social action
of the convention gained strength.”

There was a time, 10 to 15 years ago, when the convention
and its churches struggled to find their footing and to have
an identity. This crisis coincided with the withdrawal of
support by the International Mission Board of the Southern
Baptist Convention in the United States. Flores said many
young people and even pastors “left Baptist churches and
went to other groups.” There is, consequently, “a generational
leadership void” among Baptists in the country. Statistics
show that most Baptists are between 40 and 60 years old and
there are not many in the 20-40 age group.

During this period, churches were not growing, and
unity was weak. Disillusionment had set in, as local
churches complained that they were being neglected
by convention leaders. Financial contribution to the
convention from churches, already poor, as historically
only half of the churches sent money to the convention, got
even worse.

“All this led us to realize that it was time to turn back to
God,” Flores explained. There has been, over the past two
years, an emphasis on prayer and fasting. Convention leaders
started visiting local churches, asking forgiveness for their
neglect. There is now a renewed emphasis on home mission,
as well as the development of a world mission strategy.

BECP has developed “Radical Peru,” a program that
replicates that which is being done through the Union of
Baptists in Latin America, the Baptist regional body
for Latin America, in reaching and recruiting youth
for mission. As a result, “Baptist youth in Peru have
a new identity.”

All of these efforts are a fleshing out of four
strategic initiatives adopted by the convention – the training
of pastors, mission, strengthening fellowship through
strengthening churches and regional associations, and meeting
the needs of and becoming relevant to the local church.

Since these initiatives and the attendant actions, the
Baptist convention “has come to a new time.” Reconnection
with the local churches “has led to a revival of churches…
Churches are growing” and are “giving to mission work,”
Flores stated.

Annual assemblies, which were often “occasions for
battle,” are now celebratory events. The 2009 assembly,
Flores said, was very emotional with much prayer and crying
and a strong spirit of togetherness. They were able to approve
a new constitution for the convention, an issue that was left
outstanding for 15 years.

There is, however, one great need. Flores is a full-time
pastor of a congregation in Lima, and he has no administrative
support. Since the exit of the IMB, there has not been a general
secretary for the convention as such a role was normally
carried out by one of the American missionaries. Flores’
position as convention president with no administrative
support has taken him away from his church and family many
times. He hopes that the position of general secretary will
be filled soon.

By the look of things, however, Baptists in Peru have
 gained not only reputation, but a strong presence in the nation
which comprises 45 percent Amerindian and 37 percent
Mestizo, people of mixed Amerindian and European ancestry.
Baptists have contributed to the strong growth of Evangelical
Christians in the country, one of the fastest growing segments
of the population of 29 million

Children at the House of God Evangelical Baptist Church in Lima,
Peru, whose pastor is Pepe Flores, president of the Baptist Evangelical
Convention of Peru
J ose Angel Samol is the first person of indigenous ancestry to be president of the Convention of Baptist Churches in Guatemala (CBCG). Elected in 2008, Samol is symbolic of the extent to which evangelical Christianity has taken root within the indigenous community.

More than half of the 400 churches and 200 missions that are part of the CBCG are predominantly indigenous. Its largest churches are indigenous. There are approximately 25,000 Kekchi Baptists, roughly half of the entire convention of 50,000 members. Ketchi Baptists are currently constructing a church that will seat 6,000 people, making it one of the largest churches in the country. Twelve Baptist churches were established by the Quiche, and about 6,000 Tzutuhiles, the president’s own people group, are Baptists.

Yet, Amerindians in Guatemala face severe social problems, not the least of which is discrimination. “There is discrimination against indigenous groups in Guatemala,” Samol explained, “even in the church.”

But poverty is the most serious social problem. The convention is reaching out to some of the 23 ethnic minorities in the nation, most of which are marginalized and poor, manifested by high illiteracy rates, poor healthcare, and lack of potable water. It established a preschool for children who live in a major dump in Guatemala City, the country’s capital. Churches are encouraged to make an impact in health and education, and to establish programs to meet the needs of their communities. The convention developed a disaster response unit after Hurricane Mitch hit the country in 1998 so as to respond meaningfully and urgently when disasters strike in many areas that are degraded and are prone to flooding.

Pastors of churches are not immune to poverty. “Last year, we had to take up offerings to help five pastors who got sick,” one of whom eventually died, Samol reported. The CBCG is seeking to address what has been a long standing problem — there are no programs in place to assist local pastors. No pension, no healthcare provisions. There is urgent need “to take care of pastors’ wellbeing,” he said.

Despite these problems, Baptist presence in the country has witnessed a surge over the past decade, with membership growing by an average of eight percent per year. The convention is aiming for even more growth. The plan, Samol said, is to double the size of the convention over the next five years to 800 churches and 400 missions.

The aim is to emphasize proclamation, or the preaching of the Gospel; strengthen the leadership of the convention and its churches through training by establishing extensions of the seminary into other areas; expand mission outreach; and make greater use of media, doing even more than is currently being done through the convention’s radio and television ministries, and to make greater use of its website.

This is a far cry from 1946 when seven independent churches, some of which were not Baptist, came together to form the CBCG. Since then, Guatemalan Baptists have established a seminary, a music school, an academy of arts for females, and a bookstore.

Prospects are that Guatemala, like other countries in Latin America, will continue to be at the forefront of expansion and growth by Baptists worldwide.
The senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Cascavel in southern Brazil is heading up a new mission in the northern Amazon region of the country, concentrated on the borders with Venezuela, Guyana, Surinam, and French Guiana. The mission program, which is in its pilot stage, is aimed at creating “a church that is biblically and ecologically correct, with environmentally conscious congregations.”

Cruz aims to do several things. First, plant a church for an environmentally conscious worshipping community in the Amazon region. Second, establish a training institution “that will equip and train persons who are committed to an ecological mission.” Third, encourage persons at the training school to learn the languages of the bordering countries and territories – Spanish (Venezuela), English (Guyana), Dutch (Surinam) and French (French Guiana). Fourth, create a “cooperative community” of 1,500 “ecologically minded persons” as mission agents. A main feature of this community will be a recycling plant that produces new materials from waste. And finally, have these mission agents interact with people in the various communities and countries, starting with Boa Vista, the capital city of the northern Brazilian state of Roraima.

It is expected that all phases will be completed by 2015.

In order to achieve these goals, Cruz has engaged several partners, including the Union of Baptists in Latin America, the Roraima State Baptist Convention, the Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio, Texas, in the United States, as well as the Santa Helena Baptist Church in Venezuela and the Lheten Baptist Church in Guyana.

Already, Cruz has secured the land for his first church and community from the Roraima state government that will, among other things, “engage in ecologically friendly agriculture.” The church plant for that community is expected to be constructed in July of this year, taking only 30 days to complete, thus beginning the first phase of the project. The materials for the construction will, of course, be “ecologically correct.”

The Brazilian pastor developed this vision after spending a month on the Brazil-French Guiana border where he became aware of the ecological challenges that the area faces, the importance of the Amazon to the world’s health and wealth, and the Amazon’s implications for clean air, water, and the survival of important plant life. He became engrossed with the need to address the environmental problems he saw and to preserve the integrity of the Amazon. The idea of starting an environmentally sound mission program to “equip missionaries to effect ecological mission” resonated with him.

Cruz’s rationale is based on a concept of environmental stewardship. “When God created the earth and everything there is in it,” Cruz said, God “put us as administrators of all natural resources and the environment, so we are responsible for everything on earth.” We, therefore, “have a responsibility to care, preserve and manage the earth efficiently, because we will be accountable to the Creator.”

If Gilson Fontes da Cruz were to get his way, Baptist churches around the world would adopt environmentally sound mission programs.

The Brazilian pastor of First Baptist Church in Cascavel in southern Brazil is heading up a new mission in the northern Amazon region of the country, concentrated on the borders with Venezuela, Guyana, Surinam, and French Guiana. The mission program, which is in its pilot stage, is aimed at creating “a church that is biblically and ecologically correct, with environmentally conscious congregations.”

By Eron Henry

If Gilson Fontes da Cruz were to get his way, Baptist churches around the world would adopt environmentally sound mission programs.
Baptists have a reputation for being a missionary people!

And that activism surely flows from the radical commitment of the early Baptists to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and a fresh engagement with scripture. Peering through nearly 1,600 years of ecclesiastical layering, they rediscovered the biblical witness to the missionary God of the Old and New Testament, and his purposes for his church.

Their experience of persecution demanded a radical commitment to the cause. And with that commitment came a genuinely missionary zeal.

The journey to Amsterdam resulted in the first Baptist church in 1609, the anniversary we celebrate this year. A subsequent return to England saw the first Baptist church on English soil opening in 1611. Pilgrims sailing to America were the precursor to Baptist churches appearing there by the 1630s. And rapid growth was evident there by the mid-18th century.

That growth was particularly strong amongst slaves and former slaves who were drawn to the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, as they were freed, their faith became the launch pad for major missionary endeavor.

In 1773, George Liele became the first African American to be licensed as a preacher, moving to Kingston, Jamaica, in 1783, along with many others, where he established a thriving Baptist witness.

In a similar way, Prince Williams, also a freed slave from South Carolina, traveled to the Bahamas and helped establish a Baptist church, Bethel Meeting House. In Williams’ long life (he died aged 104), he influenced many people through his preaching and leadership, and subsequently more than 160 churches were planted in the Bahamas.

David George, through his childhood friendship with George Liele, was himself converted and baptized in South Carolina and eventually traveled to Sierra Leone with 12,000 Black settlers and founded the first Baptist church in that land.

Lott Carey, another freed slave, went on to pastor an 800-strong congregation in Virginia before he traveled to West Africa in 1821, establishing a ministry of church planting, healthcare and education before he died in 1828.

More names could be added to this roll call of honor but the significance of this migration is often underestimated. If for no other reason, we should be reminded of the potential for strong missionary currents flowing within the major people migrations we see today.

Meanwhile, in England, the challenge of William Carey to the prevailing theology of the day led to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society (today BMS World Mission), a work that spread to the far corners of the British Empire within a generation.

This initiative was remarkable in many respects and none more so than the new model that BMS represented. Based on the joint-stock model of the East India Company, Carey and others saw that cooperation in mission would allow so much more to be done. The use of the word “society” described the commitment of individuals and churches to a common cause, a model that survives strongly to this day.

A similar model emerged later in America and encouraged the formation of various Baptist associations and conventions. The largest of these is the Southern Baptist Convention, which has more than 5,000 career missionaries today.

As a result of the emancipation of slaves and the reach of empire, Baptists in the 19th century became established in Britain, throughout the New World, in Africa and Asia. But strangely there was almost no presence in mainland Europe until Johann Gerhard Oncken, a German, was baptized in 1834 and helped form a church in Hamburg. Oncken traveled across Europe and when asked if he was a missionary, famously responded, “Jeder Baptist ein Missionar” (“Every Baptist is a missionary”).

Today, the world of Baptist missions is transformed. Baptists from Mizoram, Nigeria, Ukraine and Korea stand alongside those from the Old World and what was once called the New World. Those from Brazil are coming close to the size and influence of those from America. Mission is happening from everywhere to everywhere.

And new missionary models are being pioneered by Baptists. The support of indigenous missionaries by traditional sending agencies is hugely significant. The utilization of business as a mission model, major Baptist input into broadcasting and bold experiments in reaching those from a Muslim background are all characteristic of a continuing missionary commitment.

Oncken was right – every Baptist is a missionary. That is how we have always understood our faith.

David Kerrigan is General Director of BMS World Mission, the primary mission agency for British Baptists. He is a member of the BWA Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation, the Mission and Evangelism Workgroup, the BWAid Committee, and the BWA Membership Committee.
Baptists are a remarkable people. Many who attended the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Living Water conference in Cairns, Australia, for leaders from the South West Pacific had a story to tell.

There was Amelia from Papua who was unjustly jailed for two and a half years in Indonesia; Mapusiya, an Enga from Papua New Guinea, who was a key translator of the Kyaka Enga Bible; and Mathhias, a bishop who leads a large baptistic group of about 65,000 baptized believers in the Solomon Islands.

There were a number of delegates from Papua New Guinea who, in recent tribal fighting, lost their homes, places of work, and had to flee for their lives; a wonderful singing group from Samoa who live and serve in New Zealand but whose music is heard throughout the South Pacific; and Rob and Win, a New Zealand couple who served as missionaries in Papua New Guinea for 30 years.

There was Billy, an indigenous Australian who is a great advocate for his Lord and for his aboriginal people; a Samoan pastor, Joshua, who has planted new congregations in the USA and New Zealand as well as five in Brisbane where he now lives; and Rod and Helen from Australia who served in the remote and rugged mountains of Papua three decades ago and are now retired and are back in Papua seeking to support the national churches.

The Living Water conference in North Queensland was the twelfth conducted by the BWA, this time in conjunction with the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF), one of six regional bodies of the BWA, and the leaders of the Baptist unions in the South West Pacific.

The conference was a beautiful, challenging and uplifting experience. The largest delegation was from Papua New Guinea, with other large groups coming from Papua and Fiji and good numbers from the Solomon Islands, New Zealand and Australia. Key indigenous leaders from New Zealand and Australia were in attendance.

A woman from Papua New Guinea sold chickens to raise her fare, another sold “meri” blouses. Delegates from Papua New Guinea and Papua managed to secure visas...
when all hope seemed lost, which bordered on the miraculous, and certainly came after a lot of prayer and hard work.

This conference was very historic because never before (except in commendable Baptist women initiatives) have Baptist leaders and people from the entire South West Pacific come together to serve, worship and to experience how enriching it is to meet sisters and brothers from nearby islands, for there was virtually no one present who was not an islander!

There was an incredible sense of Christian community throughout the conference. Time and again, the statement was made that the genius for this Living Water conference was the richness and diversity of the cultures and languages that permeated the conference. Baptists of the region had discovered each other! Perhaps nowhere was this more evident than in the network groups where strenuous enquiry and a sharing of insights between the cultures could take place. The small groups that regularly formed for prayer during the plenary sessions were a very personal and intimate way to draw close to people, most of whom were previously unknown to one another. Predictably, around meal tables, people from the various islands gathered for fellowship, laughter, animated discussion and, sometimes, to pray together.

A very educational and well received presentation was given by four indigenous Australians from Central Australia who through song explained their own striking art forms on bark sheets (iconography) and taught the delegates how the story of the life of Jesus is dramatically presented to their own people. It was significant that the conference began by acknowledging that the land on which we were meeting originally belonged to the indigenous people of Australia.

The Lord’s Supper was conducted with some special and different features; a water pouring with accompanying liturgy spoken by women from different nations in national dress; and a foot-washing service. The latter event, with two leaders from Papua New Guinea and Australia washing the feet of others, including a small girl from Papua New Guinea, an indigenous Australian woman, a Samoan woman and Australian and Fijian leaders, was a highlight and a creative expression of the Living Water motif and the servant leadership emphasis.

The BWA was represented by BWA Director of Evangelism and Education Fausto Vasconcelos, and Living Water Coordinator Tony Cupit, along with BWA commission members from within the region, Keith Jobberns, Trevor Spicer, Margaret Cupit, David Loder and Brian Winslade. Also present were APBF General Secretary Bonny Resu, Vice President John Kok from Malaysia, and Treasurer Allan Smith, as well as APBF leaders Alan Marr and Les Fussell from Australia, Victor Rembeth from Java, and Kabi Gangmei from India.
The Baptist Women’s Union of the South West Pacific (BWUSWP) came together for its quinquennial conference in Cairns, Australia, from May 1-4.

The conference, themed, “Clothed in Christ,” based on Colossians 1:12-16, opened with a colorful pageant as ladies in national dress brought their national Baptist women’s banners to the front of the hall.

Throughout the conference, women from each nation had the opportunity to describe and display the ministries of the Baptist women in their country. Countries represented included Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Fiji, West Papua (Papua Indonesia) and Australia.

Dorothy Selebano, president of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department, was a keynote speaker during the event.

“You are all unique individuals. You are loved. You are important in the eyes of God,” Selebano told the delegates.

“You are part of God’s body and if you do not do your part the body will not function properly.”

Special emphasis was given to the Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer. The Day of Prayer program for 2008 was prepared by BWUSWP and focused on the South West Pacific region. The three projects supported by offerings collected on the DOP were located in the South West Pacific.

New officers were elected and installed to lead the BWUSWP: President Julie Belding, New Zealand; Vice President Kaa Simon, Papua New Guinea; Secretary Anne MacCarthy, New Zealand; and Treasurer Judith Searle, Australia.

At the conclusion of the conference, Lorraine Walker, former BWUSWP president, challenged the women, “We have a commission from God Himself to present the unchanging but life-changing message of Christ.”


Board members discussed the events and ministries NABWU will focus on in the coming year, including ministry to refugees. One day of the meeting was devoted to educating board members about the life of a refugee. Heidi Moll Schoedel, Executive Director of Exodus World Service, led the board members in the learning experience designed to equip leaders to speak up on behalf of refugees. The women also learned how volunteers can connect in relationship with refugee families through practical service projects.

This is a significant year for NABWU as the continental union, one of seven that make up the BWA Women’s Department (BWAWD), is responsible for the Baptist Women’s World Day of Prayer (DOP) program for 2009. At the present time, the DOP program is available on the BWAWD website, www.bwawd.org, in three languages – English, Spanish and French.

NABWU is working on plans for ministry projects that will be supported by the 50 percent of the DOP offering it receives during this North American focus year. The 2009 DOP, themed “Seeing God’s creation with new eyes,” takes place on November 4.
The 20th Baptist World Congress, scheduled for July 28 to August 1, 2010, in Honolulu, Hawaii, will be preceded by a BWA Women’s Leadership Conference.

The women’s meetings will be held from July 24-27 at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. The conference, held every five years and coinciding with the Baptist World Congress, will have as its theme, “In Step with the Spirit.”

Bible studies and other sessions will be dedicated to raising awareness of issues affecting women, such as poverty and the abuse of women and children.

There will be a special emphasis on young women, and attempts are being made to facilitate the attendance of younger women at the meetings. Hence, plans are afoot to establish a scholarship of US$100,000 to enable women from various parts of the world to attend.

Information about the conference can be found on the BWA Women’s Department website: www.bwawd.org.

During the board meeting, FlashPoints, a Baptist women’s creative arts group, made a dramatic presentation titled, In the Waiting Room, through which the group shared God’s amazing promises. FlashPoints will present the theme interpretations each day at the 2010 Women’s Leadership Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, July 24-27, 2010.

More information about NABWU is available on its website: www.nabwu.org.
British Baptists were urged to recapture the passion for mission, justice and religious freedom of their forebears as they celebrated 400 years of Baptist history & heritage at the Baptist Assembly that was held in Bournemouth, England, May 1–4.

The Assembly took place ahead of a major gathering of Baptists in the Netherlands this July to mark the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Baptist movement.

For more than 300 years, Baptists have focused on those outside the church as well as those who are already believers. Neville Callam, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), challenged delegates to meet God’s call to mission today. “How is your church responding to the needs that cry out for Christian response in the community?” he asked. “And you, how are you responding to God’s call for you to be a missionary in your time?” Echoing Johann Oncken’s famous motto, Callam asked, “Every Baptist a missionary – are you one of them?”

The new president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Kingsley Appiagyei, who was inducted on the opening night of the Assembly, also called on Baptists to have a passion for non-Christians. “The church needs disciples. We are more interested in our church buildings than in making disciples. We need to regain a real passion for the lost,” he said.

David Coffey, President of the BWA, affirmed a need to engage with people from other faith traditions. Interviewed about dialogue between evangelicals and Muslim faith leaders, he said, “I think evangelicals have always found ‘dialogue’ a dangerous word, and they are suspicious that dialogue leads to syncretism: some evangelicals suggest if you get involved in Christian/Muslim conversations then you’re going to go down a slippery path.”

But he maintained the necessity of dialogue nonetheless. “For me, all evangelism has an integrity about it which involves dialogue. You can’t talk to anybody of whatever faith background without there being dialogue, and genuine dialogue involves sharing the good news about Jesus,” Coffey said. He added, “The BWA response to the Muslim letter, A Common Word, was biblically faithful and bold in its call for religious liberty and the freedom to evangelize with sensitivity.”

Assembly participants were called to pray and act for justice around the world. Lauran Bethell, American Baptist International Ministries Global Consultant on issues of prostitution and trafficking, urged delegates to have compassion on those working in the global sex industry. She also challenged Baptist churches to change their attitudes, saying “I pray that our churches would be places where the issues of intimacy and sexuality would be addressed as God-given, and that our churches provide the places where victims and victimizers are liked, can find hope and healing and unconditional compassionate love.”

Baptists were reminded that their movement was born out of a struggle against oppression, a struggle to be free – something that a huge number of Christians across the world are still experiencing. International humanitarian campaigner Caroline Cox, founder and chief executive of HART International, urged Baptists to pray for the persecuted church. “We must remember that we have our
In some parts of the world, as the church gets pushed more and more to the periphery of society, efforts are being made to find ways of making the church’s witness more effective. Two recent books by Baptists illustrate this.

The first is *Godology: Because Knowing God Changes Everything* (Moody Publishers, 2009) by Christian George.

Written for the younger generation, the book seeks to do “God talk” in contemporary language. Hardly can persons unfamiliar with this language assess the effort the book represents. Yet, it does manage to communicate complex theological ideas in what may be described as “the language of the new generation.” Furthermore, it encourages practical application of the ideas shared. Leaders of teenagers and young adults’ groups in the church might want to study this book. Some will want to share it with their college-age friends and offer it as a gift to the non-churched. No less a person than J. I. Packer, who says that he belongs to “an older generation that writes a more sober-sided English,” states in the foreword, “If you are not going to appreciate George’s semi-pop idiom, you had best conclude straightway that this book is not for you…. By writing *Godology*, Christian George has rendered significant service for the good of souls and the glory of God.”

The second is *Borderland Churches: A Congregation’s Introduction to Missional Living* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2008), written especially for people in the countries of the global north. The book presents a cogent argument for churches being intentionally missional, moving from “come to” and a “build it and they’ll come” focus to a “go to” one. Canadian author Gary Nelson makes a passionate call for Christians and churches to take their neighborhoods seriously. Churches must develop a willingness to be vulnerable, he says, as their members move out into the community strategically in missional efforts. As they do, they will minister change to their social setting and also become ever-changing communities themselves.

This clearly written book should be read especially by Christians who serve in the secular domain of everyday life. It is required reading for pastors serving in highly secularized contexts. Yet, other pastors would benefit from reading it as well. It will reinforce their commitment to the long-respected tradition of churches that have an outstanding record of extensive engagement in social transformation in the name of the triune God.

David Kerrigan, General Director of BMS World Mission, commented that this is an important time for Baptists to question their identity. “It is not every year we celebrate 400 years of Baptist witness – this will be a special year and has been a special Assembly. The theme of Baptist identity is not only about looking back. It is important to explore this as we look to our future as Baptists, both here in the UK and around the world,” he said.

Andy Renshaw is a member of Christchurch Baptist Church, Dorset, England, and was a member of the Baptist Assembly Media Team.
Roger Martin, who was elected vice president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) during its assembly from May 1-4, died on Friday, May 15.

Martin, senior pastor of Stockton Baptist Tabernacle in Stockton-on-Tees in the north of England, had been ailing for most of the year. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer on May 8 and died only a week later.

“In Roger’s passing the denomination has lost one of its most colorful ministers and staunchest supporters,” said BUGB General Secretary Jonathan Edwards. “I was delighted when the denomination honored Roger by inviting him to become our vice president, and we had recently started to lay plans for his presidential year,” stated Edwards, in reference to the expectation that Martin would have been elected president of the BUGB.

Martin served several churches as pastor in the United Kingdom for 41 years, including at Stockton for the past 10 years.

A Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving for his life was held at Stockton Baptist Tabernacle on Saturday, May 23.

He leaves wife Liz and sons Carl, James, Alex and Reuben. He was 65 years old.

Alfred Peck, former president of the Baptist Union of Scotland (BUS), died on Sunday, May 3. He was 97 years old.

Peck, a former engineer who responded to the call to the full time ministry in 1939, pastored several churches in England and Scotland, including churches in London, Leeds and Glasgow.

He was president of the BUS from 1985-1986.

A service of thanksgiving for his life was held on Saturday, May 9, at Helensburgh Baptist Church in Helensburgh, Scotland.

He leaves his wife of 54 years, Kathleen; son, Anthony, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation and Baptist World Alliance Regional Secretary for Europe; and daughter, Ruth.

Philip Wise of Andalusia, Alabama, in the United States, a former leader in the North American Baptist Fellowship, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Alabama Baptist State Convention, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, died on Monday, March 30.

He was 60 years old.

A member of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation and the Christian Education Workgroup, Wise was chair of the mini-library program of the BWA for more than 10 years, between 1997 and 2008.

The mini-library program offers gifts of books to pastors primarily in Two Thirds World countries.

He was senior pastor for several churches in Alabama and Texas in the United States, namely Fairview Baptist Church, Selma, Alabama; Morningview Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama; First Baptist Church, Dothan, Alabama; and Second Baptist Church, Lubbock, Texas.

He also taught theology and ethics at Culham College in Abingdon, England, the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in the US, and has guest lectured in seminaries and theological schools in Singapore, South Africa and Nigeria.

A graveside service took place at Memorial Cemetery, Andalusia, Alabama, on Thursday, April 2, and a memorial service at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, was held on Friday, April 3.

Wise is survived by Cynthia, his wife of 40 years, daughter Myra, and sons Doug and Fisher.

In Memoriam

Roger Martin

Alfred Peck
FROM THE PRESIDENT
David Coffey

Lessons from the Bakery

In July 2009, a group of Baptists representing the world family will stand outside 120 Amstel Street, Amsterdam, and remember with prayerful thanksgiving some notable events that took place 400 years ago.

Behind the modern facade of Amstel Street stood the East India Bakery in Bakkerstraat. Baptists claim this location as the founding place for the movement that now numbers a global community membership of more than 100 million.

A group of English believers moved courageously to the Netherlands to escape from the religious persecution they were experiencing. Worshipping in England, they were hunted and persecuted, and in some cases, imprisoned, so they sought refuge in Free Amsterdam which was renowned for its religious tolerance.

Among the group who traveled to Amsterdam was John Smyth, a Cambridge University graduate who had served as an ordained priest until he separated from the Church of England, and Thomas Helwys, a wealthy English lawyer.

In Amsterdam, the newly formed bakery congregation created a community whose worship and life together reflected more truly the New Testament pattern of a believers’ church. The studies and conversations of the community eventually led to a rejection of the practice of infant baptism and a recovery of the emphasis of baptism in the New Testament, which is the baptism of believers on the basis of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In a variety of ways the Baptist World Alliance and the European Baptist Federation will be celebrating the courage and vision of our forebears and exploring the lasting significance of their achievements. In preparation for Amsterdam, I have looked again at our ancient story and suggest some lessons from the former bakery in Bakkerstraat.

First, God uses a breadth of stimulating networks to launch a movement. Smyth and Helwys were shaped by the reforming zeal of the Puritans and Separatists of England and were influenced by the formative ideas of the Anabaptist, Mennonite and Arminian movements of mainland Europe. The lesson is to meet with a broad range of people in whom God is speaking. Be alert to the imperilled weakness of the attitude “you in your small corner and me in mine.” The greatest strength of the Christian family is the bringing together of breadth and diversity. Those who are constantly narrowing down the boundaries in the interest of maintaining the purity of the Church fail to see the losses which are incurred by this closing of the doors to wider fellowship.

Second, God blesses communities of conviction. I borrow this phrase from the title of the newly published book by my good friend Ian Randall. Read his Communities of Conviction and you will be inspired by the recounting of the earliest beginnings of the Baptist movement in all parts of Europe.

The community of Bakkerstraat was turning its back on the formalities of state religion and seeking to restore the pattern of the believers’ church of the New Testament. What they dared to attempt was outstanding in its spiritual boldness. The contemporary challenges for Baptists in their church-state relationships call for similar courageous daring. In a climate where Baptists are intoxicated by pragmatic “how to” church programs, the restoration of communities of conviction with meaningful covenant membership and healthy accountable relationships are essential values to a recovery of true Baptist identity.

Third, God works in spite of our failures. The early pages of Baptist history are a mixed story which, according to Barry White, show something of how past policies and insights were often shaped “by accident, ignorance and sometimes selfishness as well as by prudence, wisdom and costly sacrifice.” Like Paul and Barnabas, there came a sad parting of the ways for Smyth and Helwys, prompting the latter to believe his friend had made wrong decisions and leaving him with a sense of personal betrayal. We need to walk humbly with God during a time of radical reform and hold lightly to our strongest convictions, recognizing that our best theological insights are only partial. The lubricating oil of sweet reasonableness is never more required than in a time of abrasive progress.

Our celebrations in Amsterdam will not be an indulgence in nostalgia but a moment to pause and wisely reflect on Baptist beginnings. As C. S. Lewis reminds us, it is not the remembered past but the forgotten past that enslaves us.
Hear the Spirit

at the

20th Baptist World Congress

at the July 28 – August 1, 2010 Hawai‘i Convention Center, Honolulu, Hawai‘i

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