Baptist Named
US Religious Freedom Ambassador

Suzan Johnson-Cook, an American Baptist Churches USA (ABC USA) pastor in New York City, was named United States Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

Johnson-Cook was nominated by President Barack Obama as the senior diplomat in the Office of International Religious Freedom in the US Department of State. Her position was confirmed on April 14 and she was sworn in on May 16.

She was senior pastor at the Mariners’ Temple Baptist Church in lower Manhattan from 1983-1996 and the Bronx Christian Fellowship Church from 1996-2009.

Among those attending the swearing-in ceremony were Raimundo Barreto, Baptist World Alliance director of the Division of Freedom and Justice; Roy Medley, general secretary of ABC USA; and Leo Thorne, associate general secretary for World Mission Support for ABC USA.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton conducted the swearing-in ceremony.

“I congratulated her and wished her well on behalf of the BWA and of Neville [Callam],” Barreto said. “It was worth noting that among her first words of thanks, Dr. Johnson-Cook identified herself as an American Baptist and expressed deep gratitude to Roy Medley as a pastor and a friend.”

Johnson-Cook was a domestic policy advisor to former US President Bill Clinton, and was the first woman to be elected president of the Hampton University Ministers’ Conference, which represents historically African American denominations.

Among her many books are Too Blessed to Be Stressed, Becoming a Woman of Destiny, and Balancing Your Life.

The position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to promote religious freedom as a foreign policy of the US, and to advocate on the behalf of individuals in other countries who are persecuted on account of religion. The law was in response to growing concern about religious persecution globally.

Race Relations: Progress Slow but Steady

Despite tremendous progress in race relations, racial divides continue in the US, with an undercurrent of race in most social issue discussions. It is much more complex than just black and white, colored by immigration issues and economic concerns.

Baptists in Israel Celebrate 100 Years

International visitors joined Baptist believers in Nazareth to celebrate the past and look to the future, with its challenge to reach out to the Muslims and Jews of Israel with the love of Christ.
18 Baptists in US Respond to Disasters
A series of tornadoes and flooding have devastated large areas of the United States South and Midwest, prompting Baptists across the country to respond with resources, volunteers and prayers.

19 Japan Earthquake Update
Japanese Baptists provide an update on the tragic conditions in the northeast of the country and their relief efforts there. They extend their thanks for aid and support, and request continued prayer.

21 Myanmar Baptist Church Collapses after Quake
An earthquake in Myanmar brought suffering and death to eastern Shan State. Among the extensive damage was a Baptist church which collapsed with 200 people inside, killing 25.

22 Earthquake in Spain
An earthquake in Spain left a recently constructed Baptist church badly damaged and many of its families homeless.

23 BWA Statement: The Scourge of Homelessness
A BWA Statement addresses the urgent problem of homelessness around the world.

24 Freedom and Opportunity in Liberia & Ghana
Neville Callam returned from Liberia and Ghana with reports on Baptist life and ministry, where he found vibrant worship in the African style and great anticipation for the future.

26 Toward a Vibrant Future: Uruguay
Callam urged Baptists in Uruguay to a renewed passion for studying God’s Word, rediscovering the power of prayer, and commitment to service to the community.

27 Praying for Peace
Baptists joined Christians around the world to observe World Sunday for Peace in May. The BWA has consistently worked for peace, and a number of initiatives taken by Baptists serve as examples and inspiration.

28 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation
As the BWA delegate to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation held in Kingston Jamaica, Burchell Taylor reports on this gathering of 1,000 delegates from more than 80 countries.

29 In Memoriam

30 Book Notes

COVER PHOTO
First Baptist Church, Richmond, VA

Unless otherwise noted, photos in the issue are by BWA staff.
During recent months, treacherous weather-related calamities have disturbed the equanimity of many Americans. Massive flooding swamped the area extending from the Midwest to the Gulf of Mexico as rising waters from the Mississippi River and its tributaries reached sometimes historic levels. Lives were lost and homes were damaged or destroyed; thousands of hectares of farmland were inundated wiping out the livelihood of many hardworking people.

To add to the misery this year, tornadoes, with unusual frequency, have devastated many communities. Some people lost their lives, while many survivors lost all their earthly possessions. One day in April, some 173 tornadoes were spawned from a single storm system! Over the past few months, many states have been affected and the level of destruction has been heart-rending. Few experiences can be as terrifying as living in a place where a violent tornado has touched down.

One Baptist Christian wrote a letter telling of his experience. He was sheltering in the basement of the house where he was staying with others seeking protection from a twister in their area. While there, he observed on Facebook the damage being done by another tornado in a far-away state.

What struck me about the letter is how typically this American Christian reacted. From the relative safety of his basement, something began to draw him to the people who had suffered loss. He wanted to find a way to offer help and, as soon as it was possible to do so, he exited his basement and reached out to the people in a devastated community to see what help he and others might offer.

Many difficult questions arise when we face natural disasters and wise persons know that there are no easy answers to these perplexing questions. However, one thing is clear: Thoughtful Christians who are spared and others who were never at risk from the disastrous weather-related events find it quite natural to want to respond by offering help. They experience a desire to contribute to rebuilding the lives, the hopes and the dreams of those who are adversely affected.

When disaster strikes, we may throw up our hands in the air, surrendering to despair. We may speak in harsh terms about those who reject the claim that climate change is the result of irresponsible human actions. We may lose ourselves in trying to solve the problem of evil. However, we do have another option. Caring Christians offer up fervent prayers to God on behalf of those who are hurting and they examine how they may seize opportunity from the situation of disaster to present the face of Jesus to those who have little left apart from their lives.

It is wonderful to note how many caring Christians can be found in the United States and many of them are Baptist Christians – who provide the focus of this magazine! Thanks be to God!
North America

Baptists Condemn Burning of Qur'an

Baptists in North America have condemned the burning of the Qur'an by an American pastor in the state of Florida.

The Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Florida, burned a copy of the Qur'an on March 20 following a mock court trial presided over by its pastor, Terry Jones. The burning of the Qur’an led to protests by Muslims in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere, leading to loss of life, injury, and property damage.

The church had previously backed down from a threat to burn the Qur'an on September 11, 2010.

George Bullard, general secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF), one of six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), condemned the Qur'an burning, declaring that the “book burning was obviously carried out by a pastor and congregation on the fringe of Christianity, and not within its core.”

The BWA Regional Secretary for North America maintained that “a basic tenet of Christian civility is mutual respect for all of humankind, their deeply held faith perspectives, and that which they consider holy; such as their holy books.”

Bullard went on to say, “While as Christians we consider the Bible to be the record of the authoritative, inspired Word of the Triune God, we do not live out the spirit of God’s Word if we support or are silent about the burning of books like the Qur’an. Such actions sadden Baptist Christians everywhere, and provide an opportunity to express the love of God for all people; especially our Muslim brothers and sisters.”

American Baptist Churches USA (ABC USA) also decried the book burning. Their General Executive Council, made up of national and regional leaders, and which met in Orlando, Florida, in early April, called the Qur’an burning the desecration of a sacred text that violates “the Great Commandment of Jesus to love God wholly and the neighbor as ourselves.”

The group, also a BWA member body, indicated that the burning of the Qur’an “is not representative of the larger American Christian community, is an act that we deplore and causes us to reaffirm our historic Baptist commitment to religious liberty for all people and all faiths.”

The ABC USA statement avers that “in our religiously diverse world we believe it is vitally important that we all reach out to each other with respect and openness to advance mutual understanding and cooperation among faith communities.”

South Africa

Women Make Plans for 2015

The Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department (WD) is in the process of making plans for the Women’s Leadership Conference to be held in Durban, South Africa, in July 2015. The conference is to immediately precede the 21st Baptist World Congress in the same city.

WD Director Patsy Davis made a site visit to Durban in May, traveled to the conference venue, and met local leadership of Baptist women’s groups in the country.

She held meetings with leaders of the women’s departments of the Baptist Convention of South Africa, which included Dorothy Selebano, the immediate past president of the WD; the Baptist Union of Southern Africa; the Baptist Association of South Africa; and the Baptist Mission of South Africa.

She toured the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Durban where both the Women’s Leadership Conference and BWA Congress will be held. “The ICC is strategically located near Durban’s central business district, just minutes from hotels and beaches and approximately 35 kilometers from the King Shaka International Airport,” Davis observed. “The ICC is a cultural hub in which Africa and the world can now meet on an even greater scale. Start making your plans to attend all of the BWA events in 2015,” she said.

Davis was keynote speaker at a seminar planned by the women’s department of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa on the theme, “Prayer changes Lives.”

The Baptist women’s leader made presentations showing “how God is using Baptist women to impact the world for Christ.”

Davis visited the Osiame Nursing College, an accredited nursing school, founded by Selebano, who served as BWA WD president from 2005-2010.

“IT is a much respected college, and known for the excellent preparation of its students,” Davis reported.
Greetings in His name. I pray again this finds you well and well kept by our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. We have just returned from the Lowdar mission. I was able to take 22 people with me for this mission. It took us 30-36 hours to drive on a very rough road but by the Grace of God we all arrived safely. Before the trip we were very concerned about our safety and that our vehicles would not break on the way and are thankful that the Lord answered this prayer.

Lowdar is about 800 kms from Nairobi and about 220 kms to Southern Sudan. Turkana as they call it is so big in terms of area though not very populated. Most people in this area are pastoralists and many times they move from one place in search of pastures for their animals. The area is a semi-desert and very hot and at times experiences hot temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius. The Baptist work began there about 20 years ago. They have 41 Baptist churches and out of these churches only eight have a building and semi-buildings. Thirty-three churches meet under a tree and this is an experience that I would not love to go through. The area is hot all through and if by chance they get rain it does not last for a week.

People live in houses called the manyattas where many people will stay in round houses with walls of grass and a grass roof. The people are so much into custom and traditions, there is a great need for training/teaching for pastors and the members.

Our mission to this area was to partner with the local association and help in the areas of evangelism, crusade, seminar, food and clothes distribution. We were able to do all these things and we were able to reach 306 people with the gospel one on one, not to mention the people who came for the crusade each evening. We had a total of 106 people who prayed to receive Christ, many were encouraged, especially pastors who looked so helpless, and we fed about 250 people, giving food to many families who did not have anything.

While there we saw two people die because they had not eaten for days. An elderly woman and a small child that we had prayed with passed on before we got the food to them. Each day our team walked for many miles to go to the manyattas to share the gospel. On Sunday my team and I had an opportunity to worship under a tree on just bare ground. People were very attentive to the preaching and teaching and are very open to the gospel. My people were very moved by the conditions that these people live in. No food and water for days, they depend on government relief food. They last received a portion in February this year and live each day with the hope that food will come their way. We saw people suffering, poverty, and hunger, but also hearts that are ripe for the word of God.

I request all to pray for these people. I have attached a few photos for you to see the situation. I pray that our church will be involved in making a difference in this community and would encourage you too to join with us in prayer and the Holy Spirit leading as to how best to serve others while we have the opportunity to do so. Thank you all for your prayers. Please continue to pray for our church planting mission in August.

Serving the risen savior.

Euticauls Nzengu
April 27, 2011

Pastoralists at the Lowdar mission in a semi-desert region in Kenya. The area was visited by Euticauls Nzengu and others from the Baptist Convention of Kenya who undertook evangelism, crusade, and seminar activities, and distributed food and clothes.
“We are powerful witnesses for God, backed by the Holy Spirit. Transformation is possible because men of God are in all places in society, in the church, in politics and sport. I believe that the only thing that can bring back the values of dignity is Jesus Christ. We are witnesses if we are qualified. We need to continue living in the truth. We must live the truth. We need to continue maintaining the faith. God has chosen us to be honest. We need to break paradigms so that we can grow. We need to understand that the time has come to sow in the name of God.”

With these words, the president of the Union of Baptists in Latin America (UBLA), Ivan Martinez, inaugurated the second Summit of the Presidents and Executive Secretaries of the Baptist Conventions of Latin America in the Four Points Hotel in Montevideo, Uruguay, held April 13 to 16, 2011.

Parrish Jacome, pastor of a large church in Guayaquil, Ecuador, led discussions on the need for a collaborative approach in dialogues. Collaborative dialogues help to identify and build on the positives in our history and present realities as Baptists, enabling the church to anticipate rather than to merely react, accentuating the positive rather than the negative.

In the past, we relied on the financial resources and what we were taught by missionaries, but now it is different. We must build the vision. As Latinos we must join together in a vision and work together. This is why we talked about the four large continental initiatives during the summit:

(1) Campaign of the Americas. Jorge Rochaix, president of the Baptist Evangelical Convention of Paraguay, said that the campaign, “Christ the only hope,” which was a continent-wide effort, was the means God used for his conversion to Christ.

(2) Campaign Total Manager. July Xavier Alvarado of Ecuador said that God spoke to him in a personal way and he changed the form of administration in his church. When he launched the program in his church, the finances grew four times.

(3) Others mentioned the growth in their churches and conventions as a result of the “There is life in Jesus” initiative.

(4) Finally, the creation of UBLA was mentioned as a positive development that has been an instrument for unity and cooperative work.

After talking about these four events, three major themes for each region were introduced: 1) Reaching the major urban centers; 2) Development of the local church; and 3) Development of a spirituality, which includes integrity and values.

The summit concluded with the following proposals: the Bolivarian countries and Mexico spoke of the need to promote spirituality, prayer vigils, urban movements such as cell groups, churches of the third generation, evangelism, and a ministry between academics and chaplaincies. From the Southern Cone and Brazil, proposals included key expansion by planting new churches, along with the training of leadership and pastors. The young people of Brazil and Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile will collaborate in evangelistic efforts during the World Cup of 2014 and the Olympics of 2016.

The summit concluded with the preaching of John Upton, the president of the Baptist World Alliance, who spoke on Mark chapter 6.

Upton said that “there is great power when the people of God meet. The kingdom grows when we work together.” He encouraged Latin American Baptists to “return to the missionary vision” and to place everything in Jesus’ hands. “When you put things in the hands of Jesus, he can do great things. When we put a little bit in the hands of Jesus, we can change the world,” Upton said.

When the summit ended, we joined in the celebration of the centenary of the beginning of Baptist work and witness in Uruguay. When we said our goodbyes we were assured that this was not merely a meeting, but was an event whose results will continue to be felt in the next several years.

Alberto Prokopchuk is the general secretary for the Union of Baptists in Latin America and the BWA regional secretary for Latin America.
in the industrial cities of Rijeka, Sisak, and Karlovac. There were some religious publications. Many Baptist believers migrated in the 1950s and 1960s from villages to towns looking for jobs and they started churches in order to fulfill their spiritual needs.

In 1991 Yugoslavia ceased to exist and the Croatian Baptist Union was formed. Baptists doubled in the number of members and congregations. The current vision is to plant a Baptist church in each of the 21 counties. There are 50 churches and mission stations with a total of 1,900 members. The president of the Baptist union is Toma Magda and the general secretary is Zeljko Mraz.

One of the church plants is located in Novi Marof, approximately 100 kilometers from Zagreb. There are about 20 people who regularly meet for Bible study and worship. The meetings take place in a rented hall and are led by indigenous church planter, Jonatan. The group has been meeting there for one year. There are counseling sessions twice a week where persons can come to talk or find advice about some spiritual or practical issues.

Jonatan says, “There are two reasons that prompt me to plant a church in Novi Marof: the Great Commission and God’s love toward lost people who need to be saved. The target group is especially the young people burdened with various problems (addictions, unemployment, depression, etc.). In order to accomplish this goal we have started the Christian counseling. This ministry serves all who need advice and encouragement, and who seek the true meaning of life.”

Jonatan is married to Daniela and they have two small children.

Jonatan owes a lot to the strong support from the mother church in Varazdin, where his father Nikola Vukov is the pastor. The mother church is 15 kilometers away from Novi Marof. Nikola explains that the church was planted 15 years ago and has grown.

The church is also exceptionally mission-minded and has developed a program of planting other Baptist congregations in the region. In addition to Novi Marof, where Jonatan is leader, the other is in Ivanec.

There are 15,000 inhabitants in the town of Novi Marof and the new group is the only evangelical fellowship in the town. In the region of Varazdin-NovI Marof there are approximately 200,000 people but only three evangelical churches.

According to Zeljko Mraz, “The union has always been involved in church planting even when there was no written strategy for it in the past. But the time has come for much more intentional mission work so the union has worked out a document called Strategy 2020. Our hope and prayer is that our new strategy will be effectively implemented.”

Both Toma Magda and Mraz can see a lot of positive changes among Croatian Baptists during the last two or three decades. The union leaders are also happy about the good fellowship among the pastors and appreciate effective partnerships with other Baptist unions.

Daniel Trusiewicz is mission coordinator for the European Baptist Federation.

By Daniel Trusiewicz

There have been many positive changes among Croatian Baptists during the last two or three decades. The union has doubled in size and the number of congregations has increased.

The roots of Croatian Baptists are to be found in the missionary outreach of J. G. Oncken who is often called the “Father of European Baptists.” The earliest conversions and home gatherings happened in 1872-73. However the first Baptist congregations in Zagreb and Daruvar were founded as late as the 1890s.

Growth of the Baptist movement came in the years 1922-39 (after World War I) under the leadership of Vinko Vacek. He was known for his vivid energy to travel across the country to visit groups of people, preach the gospel, teach the Bible and form new churches. At that time Croatian Baptists numbered about 600 and were part of Yugoslavia.

Further growth came after World War II, when Baptist congregations were planted

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Top: left to right, Zeljko Mraz and Jonatan and Nikola Vukov of the Baptist mission in Novi Marof, Croatia

Below: Members of the Novi Marof mission in Croatia at a fellowship meeting
The United States has the most Baptists of any country, comprising 23.4 million Baptists out of a total of 37 million among Baptist World Alliance member organizations. Even allowing for duplication (many churches are aligned with two or more conventions), the numbers are impressive.

Baptists have made a deep imprint on the United States. The famous declaration by US President Thomas Jefferson that there should be a “wall of separation between church and state” was from a letter by Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut on New Year’s Day in 1802. The president was responding to a letter from the association sent in October 1801 seeking clarification on religious liberty.

Jefferson’s quote, elicited by the Baptists, has been the benchmark used by many, in addition to the First Amendment of the US Constitution, to clarify the relationship between church and state.

The First Amendment itself, which Jefferson quoted in his letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, arose from strenuous Baptist intervention. Baptists were the first to place the notion of religious freedom as a constitutional concern in the US. Roger Williams founded the colony of Providence (present-day Rhode Island) in 1636 with complete freedom in religious matters, and helped to found the first Baptist church in the colony.

Religious freedom was a hard won fight. In 1651 in Massachusetts, Obadiah Holmes was publicly whipped in Boston for participating in a Baptist home prayer meeting. Henry Dunster, the second president of Harvard, lost his job in 1654 for affirming believer’s baptism.

In colonial Virginia, Baptists were frequently jailed for preaching, and they lobbied the legislature for religious liberty, which later passed the Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1786. Virginia Baptists, led by John Leland and others, persuaded President James Madison to include a firm guarantee of religious liberty in the amendments to the US Constitution known as the Bill of Rights. Hence, the First Amendment which reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

(Continued on next page)
Second only to India, where there are 22 member bodies, the US has the most member organizations that are part of the BWA, numbering 18. The most recent member is the District of Columbia Baptist Convention (DCBC), whose application for membership was approved this year. The DCBC becomes the fourth US “state” convention to gain membership within the BWA. Most other US BWA members have a national or regional focus, rather than being restricted to a particular US state. The DCBC joins the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Baptist General Convention of Missourri, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas as US state conventions with BWA membership.

Conventions were established to meet the distinctive needs of particular racial, ethnic and cultural groups, including those of a predominantly Anglo origin, such as American Baptist Churches USA, which has diversified considerably.

Five groups are historically African American bodies: the National Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention, USA, the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention.

Converge Worldwide (CW), formerly known as the Baptist General Conference, originally comprised Swedish immigrants who settled in the United States to escape religious persecution in Europe. Having become more diverse, there are now 231 so-called “ethnic” churches that are part of the 1,166 churches that are affiliated with CW. The North American Baptist Conference of Churches, which grew out of churches ministering primarily to German immigrants in the 19th century, has grown into a more diverse body.

Other nationalities that immigrated into the US have established their own unions: the Czechoslovak Baptist Convention of USA and Canada, the Russian-Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Union, and the Union of Latvian Baptists in America. There are other such bodies with membership in the North American Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA. These include the Laotian National Baptist Fellowship and the Association of Brazilian Baptist Churches in North America.

Baptists in the US have made an immense contribution in education. There are more than 110 colleges, universities, divinity schools and seminaries that are or were Baptist-affiliated, in addition to numerous schools from kindergarten through grade 12.

Baptists in the US have distinguished themselves in international mission. Following the example of Adoniram and Ann Judson who went in 1813 to what is today Myanmar, thousands of Baptist missionaries have been engaged in mission in other countries. US Baptists have been responsible for founding Baptist work in countries in most continents and regions, including in Latin America, sections of the Middle East, and areas in Asia. Baptist work in the Caribbean was started by African Americans George Liele in Jamaica in 1783 and Prince Williams in the Bahamas in 1790. Through the migration of African American Baptists to Liberia in the 1800s, the West African nation has one of the earliest and strongest Baptist witnesses on the continent, as is also the case in Nigeria and other countries.

Baptists in the US continue to make their contribution to the worldwide Baptist family through the BWA in funding, leadership, theological reflection, aid and development, and in other important ways, a historical commitment that has not diminished over the years.

George Liele, regarded by some scholars as the first Baptist missionary. Liele, a freed American slave, founded Baptist work in Jamaica in 1783.
Ricky Creech leads one of the most diverse Baptist bodies in the United States following his election March 28 as executive director of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention (DCBC).

The DCBC’s 153 churches include pastors who self-identify both as fundamentalist and as liberal; they are divided nearly evenly between predominantly black or white memberships and many have female ministerial staff; it has the ethnic language churches you would expect in an international city; it affiliates with four national Baptist entities; and it intentionally magnetizes mission to create unity, rather than trying to hammer out universal agreement on theological fine points.

All of which pumps the blood right through Creech’s veins.

As director of mission in the Birmingham, Alabama Baptist Association during a decade rife with racial and theological controversies, Creech felt he “wore a target on my back.” The association building was firebombed in 1998, a response, Creech believes, to more black churches joining the association and to the association’s high profile social ministries. The FBI investigated the attack as a hate crime and Creech said the bombing and mailed threats to his family came from persons outside the association.

And, in 2000 when Southern Baptists adopted a statement of faith that disavowed women in pastoral roles, one of his association churches called a female pastor.

Creech, 47, left full-time Baptist employment in 2006 and consulted churches interested in doing ministry “outside the box.” Gifted in fixing things, Creech joined the staff of an Atlanta area United Methodist church that was reeling from staff issues including embezzlement and moral failure.

While he loved his service there, it also confirmed to him that denominational work was in his DNA.

DC Convention Historic

The DCBC traces its roots back to the Baltimore Baptist Association, which started in 1793. Controversies, population growth and people movement carried the affiliation of the few DC area churches from Baltimore, to the Maryland Baptist Union Association, to the Potomac Baptist Association in Virginia. Finally, in November 1877, six Washington churches formed the autonomous Columbia Association of Baptist Churches to “throw upon us a burden of evangelical duty.”

As early as 1880 the association built a home for the aged and in 1914 it started a residential home for disadvantaged children. The association renamed and aligned itself as the DCBC in 1934. Always a convention with a worldview, the DCBC shared property with the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) from 1947 until 1984 when the BWA moved offices to Virginia.

Rufus Weaver, executive director 1934-43, led in establishing the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs

“Diversity is good, but community is better. . . . We have the audacity to believe you can be both diverse and united in mission.”

— Jeffrey Haggray, past DCBC executive director

By Norman Jameson

These articles were written by Norman Jameson, former editor of the Biblical Recorder, the newjournal of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, and who is now engaged in Public Relations and Funds Development. The articles were originally commissioned by the North American Baptist Fellowship, a regional fellowship of the BWA.
as an effort to unify Baptists in America so that on national and international issues they could interject their convictions with one voice.

The DCBC has always been related to the American Baptist Churches USA (ABC USA) and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In 1998 it became triply aligned by affiliating with the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) and recently added a fourth affiliation, joining the BWA.

Under Jere Allen, executive director from 1991-2000, the DCBC initiated a racial reconciliation resolution that was adopted by the SBC in 1995.

The resolution, which drew fire from colleagues around the nation, informed DCBC commitments to diversity and the DCBC included in subsequent strategic plans expectations for all committees and committee chairs to reflect the convention’s racial and gender makeup. Staff also had to reflect that diversity. The annual meeting is hosted alternately by black and white churches.

“It’s amazing to go to a convention or a training conference of the DCBC and see the diversity there,” said Allen, 76, who now lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

When Allen realized that leaders of both the ABC USA and SBC sometimes worked in the same town and had never met, he sponsored an historic meeting for them in Washington where they informally agreed to better communications.

Allen also led DC churches to adopt legislators, and began a prayer ministry for members of Congress.

In 2001, with background both in ABC USA and the PNBC, Allen’s successor, Jeffrey Haggray, was the first African-American to become an executive of a state convention in the SBC and the second to lead a region affiliated with ABC USA.

Currently pastor of First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, Haggray dealt with the loss of about a half million dollars annually when the SBC’s agency that supports work in North America withdrew funds at the encouragement of a Washington, DC pastor over theological issues.

That loss of funds caused some reduction in staff and campus and social service ministries, but, “We’re still here,” said Leslie Copeland-Tune, director of communications and resource development, who pointed out that other state conventions now must accommodate significant funding cuts from the same agency.

Haggray said the convention stood by the biblical principle that “male and female hath He created them” and “decided we would affirm women in ministry on equal
footing with men and would not be told by any external body that we couldn’t do that.”

Their costly action was “not about affirming women, but affirming Baptists,” Haggray said. “At some point Baptists have to ask, ‘Are we seriously committed to autonomy of the local church and the ability of Baptists to interpret scripture according to conscience?’”

As an “expression of Baptist witness in the nation’s capital,” Haggray said DC churches must deal with the diversity represented in various national bodies and personified by those coming to the city to work and live. “You don’t get to choose who is coming to DC,” Haggray said. “We seek to be a welcoming fellowship with focus on the Washington area as the mission field.”

“When you’re on the mission field you have a very different view toward it than does someone who is not on the mission field,” Haggray said. “Once you get here in this very powerful and complex city, you want prayer partners; you want people to work with together, to strategize in mission with folks.”

Although Haggray says the strength of the DCBC is its unity, diversity and openness to cooperate with others, diversity is not a goal. “You can have diversity on a city bus and nobody is talking to each other,” he said.

“Diversity is good, but community is better,” he said. “It’s really community that we seek, to be a community of Baptists in the Washington area, joining resources to achieve our mission.

“We have the audacity to believe you can be both diverse and united in mission.”

Creech Is Up

It is Haggray that Creech succeeds.

“The DCBC has played a strategic role in Baptist life due to its commitment to bridging the divides among Baptists,” said Roy Medley, general secretary of ABC USA. “We pray God’s blessings upon Dr. Creech as he gives leadership to this wonderfully diverse convention encompassing our nation’s capital.”

Creech is a graduate of Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He was a church and community missionary in Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama, for the SBC Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) which cut its support of the DCBC.

In 1997 Creech was elected executive director of the Birmingham Baptist Association, a Deep South association that today has about 135 congregations.

Ironically, Creech’s positive reputation in church and community ministries as a missionary brought him to consult with the DCBC during that time. When the Birmingham association was looking for an executive director in 1998, the search committee asked DCBC Executive Director Jere Allen for a recommendation and he told them they had the man they needed already on staff in Ricky Creech.

“I’m good at going into troubled organizations and fixing things,” said Creech, whose philosophy of associational work is that “missiology pulls people together” and the “minutiae of theology builds barriers.”

“Not only was my ministry experience ecumenical in Birmingham, but I was flexible enough that United Methodists would hire me,” Creech said with a chuckle. He said the DCBC search committee was “very keen their new executive understands ecumenism.”

Creech sees several immediate challenges facing the DCBC, with its $1.1 million budget, including the need to develop multiple streams of income. “That day has gone,” he said, when conventions can depend exclusively on congregational giving.

Conventions must find partners who share various convention priorities and may provide some funding. As an example, Creech cited the goal of Birmingham Baptists to remedy substandard housing. They sought and received a community development block grant that increased from $30,000 the first year to $750,000 by the time he left.

He knows the convention must “rebrand itself” and promote its vision to garner congregations’ support. He intends to focus on unique services to empower congregations to fulfill their greatest potential for witness and ministry in their unique context.

“Solutions are not found in a ‘one size fits all’ box but in relationships with those who journey with you asking the hard questions, challenging the status quo, encouraging risk-taking and inspiring God-sized dreams,” Creech said.

“DCBC has a history of being on the forefront of ministry and building unique relationships and it is upon that history that we want to build the future.”

Facing page: Drawing depicting African American Baptists meeting in Washington, DC, in the 19th century

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It might not seem like much, but movement from interracial hate to a more benign distrust is some measurable progress among races since the start of the Civil War in the United States 150 years ago.

Churches may still be the most segregated institutions in America but leaders of denominational entities affiliated with the North American Baptist Fellowship point to specific improvements to justify encouragement.

Carroll Baltimore, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), grew up with second-hand books from the white school. He endured rock pelting while walking to the school to pick up the used books, in which students had written derogatory remarks, knowing who was going to get them. Later he could not join his white soldier friends in a restaurant or movie theater.

Since then, he has observed “tremendous progress” in race relations as he travels coast to coast while leading the two million-member convention.

He notes improvements for black Americans in access to education, job opportunities, housing equality and more opportunities to create personal wealth that simply were not available during his childhood.

Baltimore believes racial divides continue because people won’t talk about race, even though there is an “undercurrent of race in most social issue discussions.” He was so concerned that he appointed a commission on race relations and cultural diversity within the PNBC.

“In some ways we’re ‘stuck’ because we don’t understand,” Baltimore said. “Because we don’t understand, we have deep cultural biases. . . . Race issues may be more cultural bias than anything else.”

John Mendez, chairman of the commission Baltimore appointed, chaired a similar commission for the National Council of Churches. Commissioners traveled to “hot spots” to intervene in racially tense situations, he said, lending their voice and support in public media. He has proposed the PNBC commission function similarly.

Mendez believes racism is pervasive. If people measure racism by the incidents of hate crimes committed by extremists, they too easily dismiss their own racism because they are “not like that.” He believes “everyday racism” in the resegregating of schools, discrimination in jobs and housing is as bad today as ever. “I don’t buy into that argument that we are beyond racism, or that racism is only hate crimes,” he said.

Daniel Vestal, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), said economics – the way the system treats poor people – might be the primary flash point around racial issues.

“There is something wrong with a country that accepts the great diversity between rich and poor. And there is something wrong with a government that encourages that,” said Vestal.

The North Carolina state organization of the CBF has sponsored a series of racial reconciliation conferences that draw small but intense crowds who try to understand the ramifications of “white privilege.”

Speakers both black and white said being born white in America endows a person with privilege he or she likely never realizes, but white skin clears a path through life that is often blocked for persons of another color.

In economic recession, the issue of white privilege becomes more prominent, said Mendez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. “People feel like somebody is taking something away from them,” he said. “It’s pretty rough, pretty bad out there right now.”

Darryl Aaron, pastor of First Baptist Church on Highlands Avenue in Winston-Salem, articulated what non-white persons often endure, simply because they are non-white. When his impatient children ran laughing out of a store he had to tell them very seriously that as black children they “can’t just run out of a store. Even if you have the receipt, you can’t just run out of a store.”

Election of a black president has polarized the nation around racial issues, rather than eased tensions, Baltimore feels. Many attribute the ongoing “question” of President Obama’s birth as an American to be nothing more than thinly veiled racial hostility, believing a black man could not have legitimately won the presidency.

Mendez believes attacks on President Obama and questions of his birthplace are “purely racist. That’s never happened to a president before.”

Baltimore’s perception could be right if racial tensions are centered in fear and power, as many believe. Tension and fear arise when those in majority and its concomitant power see their numbers – and thus their power – falling into minority status.

Emmanuel McCall, a former vice president of the BWA and member of the BWA Commission Against Racism, has worked for decades in cross cultural and interracial relationships.
Last year Emmanuel McCall, for many years the liaison to black churches of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board), made presentations at four major conferences on race. Underlying the discussion at each was the fear of what’s going to happen when “they” outnumber “us.”

It is not just a black and white issue, as African Americans feel threatened in job markets competing among Hispanic, Asian and African immigrants. McCall said that in Atlanta where he lives, Nigerian immigrants have practically taken over the taxi cab driver market.

In May 2010 during one of his 66 international mission trips, Baltimore met a Vietnamese Fulbright scholar who asked him why no one can tell her why almost any ethnic group can come to the US and rise economically in just a few years, but African Americans still struggle.

He told her American blacks still have not been healed from the issue of slavery, “basically because we have not been open and honest and we don’t talk about the issues and we don’t know who we are on a lot of levels.”

Integration actually came at the cost of community, Baltimore says, quoting an insight from Blowing the Trumpet in Open Court by Boykin Sanders, once pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where Martin Luther King also once was pastor. Black businesses lost customers when people could shop anywhere; black communities lost homeowners when banks no longer “red lined” suburban areas and black denominations lost churches when they were no longer the only option.

Baltimore’s daughter found deep rooted cultural and racial biases when she moved to Miami, Florida, that she did not know existed. People there use racial language that divides when they refer to Haitians, for example. Various cultural groups talk negatively about each other.

Baltimore sees bright spots in young people who “look through a different lens.”

Emmanuel McCall, 75, has worked for decades in cross cultural and interracial relationships, directing the cooperative work of Southern Baptists’ Home Mission Board with National Baptists, and has served the Baptist World Alliance in various capacities, including as a vice president and on the BWA Commission Against Racism. When he started in 1968, he said “race relations” was considered “a dirty word” in his context.

He grew up outside that context where the biggest ethnic conflicts occurred between various European ethnic groups who lived in his Pennsylvania community. McCall and his father raised pigs for separate New Year’s Day celebrations at 17 ethnic community centers as immigrants separated themselves from each other.

He became embroiled in race conflict as a student at the University of Louisville where, as the only black in the Baptist Student Union, local pastors asked BSU director Fred Whitty to exclude him. Whitty refused and students said they would “close the place down” if they were forced to exclude McCall.

Decades later, McCall sees formerly white churches in racially changing communities increasingly giving their property to black congregations who can minister in the community, rather than selling the property and giving proceeds to mission boards for ministry elsewhere. That happened for a church he led that grew to 400 in its first year and is “happening across the nation,” he said.

McCall is editing a two issue series for the Review and Expositor on race relations, which will be published in November and February 2012.

As immigrants continue to pour into the US, with subsequent questions about citizenship, security, a melting pot society and most importantly – jobs – McCall referred to his former colleague Oscar Romo’s description of merging ethnicity. Romo said America should not be referred to as a “melting pot” but rather a “stained glass” in which each element retains its identity but its uniqueness contributes to a beautiful whole.

Like Baltimore, McCall sees “great hope” in young people. He teaches at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology and said his students laugh at issues their parents argued over.

Vestal, who leads a young organization, just 20 years old, said CBF recognizes through its involvement in the BWA and the North American Baptist Fellowship that “the Baptist family is not just all of one race or ethnic group and that we need each other in fellowship and community.”

He called the 2008 New Baptist Covenant “one of the most significant Baptist meetings I’ve ever been to because it cut across the racial divide in Baptist life.”

A “child of the 60s,” Vestal said the civil rights movements and the ministry of Martin Luther King forever changed the racial relations in this country and that Christian churches “played a significant role in the civil rights movement.”

Vestal feels “deep pockets of racism” are still evidenced through a “growing disparity economically,” much of which has a racial dimension.

While North American Baptist Fellowship partners note progress on many fronts, some current challenges still date to the oldest possible issue: embracing as brothers and sisters those who are “other” and to whom Baptists still are distant.
The Christian pilgrim to the Holy Land may not notice fellow Christians while touring Israel and Palestine, as most residents are Jewish and Muslim. Despite this, a community of devoted followers of Jesus has lived in the Holy Land since the time of the apostles, and continues to be salt and light in the midst of the land torn by conflict.

In May 2011, Baptists from utmost parts of the world came to Nazareth especially to celebrate with local Baptists a century of Baptist witness in the land of Jesus. The event was sponsored by the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, which consists mainly of Arab believers, and counts around 800 members in 20 churches and a community of 3,000 people.

The event was titled “The Nazareth Miracle.” While Jesus did not do miracles in Nazareth, he was the greatest miracle of all. Baptists in Israel see another miracle in God’s faithfulness with them, as Baptist churches were able to sustain a witness in the Holy Land for more than 100 years, overcoming numerous wars and so many people displaced and scattered. Baptist churches continue to grow in recent years despite challenges and pressures of being a minority among a minority.

As a time to remember the past, names of all 137 Baptist missionary families who served in Israel were read. During the three day event, Baptists in Israel honored 25 families, both missionary and indigenous, with a special “thank you” plaque.

Rhadia Shorrosh was the first baby admitted to the George W. Truett orphanage in Nazareth in 1946 and grew up with 19 Palestinian children that were raised by Southern Baptist missionaries. She is now a retired social worker and lives in Nazareth. During the celebrations, she presented a plaque to her sisters, missionary daughters Lenore and Debby Lindsey, who grew up with her while their father, Dr. Robert Lindsey, was in charge of the orphanage. The late Dr. Lindsey, a Biblical scholar, caused a diplomatic incident in 1960 when he crossed the border between Israel and Jordan in a heroic attempt to save one of the orphan kids, and while doing that, he was injured and lost a foot.

Dwight and Emma Baker served for 28 years in Israel and were responsible for reviving Baptist work in Nazareth after the 1948 war. They are both in their nineties and were not able to attend the celebration, so they sent the audience an emotional recorded greeting from their home in Texas. The special plaque with a “thank you” for the faithfulness of the Bakers was sent with one of the participants at the end of the conference. Emma Baker was not able to receive the plaque, as she died two weeks after the celebration. During her funeral, the plaque was presented to the grieving husband by a Baptist friend from Texas.

The conference was very well attended by Baptists from different countries and traditions who shared together in lovely fellowship with Baptists from Israel. The main speaker at the opening service was John Upton, president of the Baptist World Alliance. He reminded everyone in the audience that when we begin our next 100 years, and it might appear there will be no way to accomplish our mission or dreams, God will give a way. He brought greetings on behalf of the Baptist family around the world to one of the smaller Baptist bodies in the BWA, and encouraged local Baptists that God has opened doors for them in the past 100 years at every key moment that they needed one.

The conference was very well attended by members of the Southern Baptist Convention International Mission Board, who sponsored Baptist work in Israel between 1921 and 1995. A main speaker in the conference was Gordon Fort, vice president of global strategy of the IMB. He encouraged local Baptists to stand strong with their faith and present it to others. He gave the example of the young man from Safad, Shukri Mosa, who began the work in Nazareth in 1911, and

Tony Peck, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation and BWA regional secretary for Europe, left, presents a commemorative souvenir to Monther Naum, chairman of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel.
another young man from Texas, who gave 2,700 dollars in 1924 to buy the land for the Baptist church and Baptist school to be built in Nazareth.

David Coffey, former president of the BWA, told Baptists of Israel that they are faced with a ministry of love and reconciliation and told them that they have exhibited that ministry this week with the impressive diversity of the guest list. “Your 100th birthday party has brought together a range of Christian friends who might not otherwise have a reason for meeting. We are here because of you! I discern there are many more areas for you to focus this ministry of reconciliation. There are the urgent causes of Baptist unity, evangelical unity and the task of building bridges of understanding with the historical Christian denominations of this region and the challenge of engaging with the Jewish and Muslim communities in the Middle East, however daunting this challenge may appear.”

A workshop about Baptist history drew the attention of the audience, with a few participants being ones that made history happen themselves. During the question and answer session, a skeptical young man from the audience asked: “Nice history. What about the future?” While the moderator began to answer the question, a lady from the crowd raised her hand and said she wanted to answer: “I wanted to say that I am the future” and she began to cry. She then said that she is a follower of Jesus from a Muslim background. Her message was prophetic. The next challenge for Baptists in Israel is to reach out to the Muslims and Jews with the love of Christ.

This same woman, together with two other relatives, and 10 others, were baptized in the Jordan River at the end of the conference. It was with tears of joy that Baptists from all around the world saw these new believers make a public commitment, in the same waters where Jesus himself was baptized by John the Baptist, and a voice from heaven said: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

To get involved with Baptist work in Israel, please visit www.baptist.org.il.

_Bader Mansour is secretary and development officer of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel._

_Below: Baptists from the Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, Israel and Palestine, plant an olive tree near the Jordan River, in honor of 100 years of Baptist witness in the Holy Land

_Bottom: Candidates getting ready to be baptized in the Jordan River_
Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam has called upon Baptists around the world to offer prayer and support to the United States in the wake of a series of natural disasters that have been affecting the North American country.

Large areas of the US South and Midwest were flooded in the months of April and May by the Mississippi River and its tributaries, covering towns and cities in the states of Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, flooding thousands of homes. The flooding and associated storms have claimed more than 380 lives in seven states.

Hundreds of tornadoes in several states killed several hundred persons and caused widespread damage, mainly in the Southeast and Midwest of the US. Large areas of the state of Alabama and the city of Joplin in Missouri were among the worst affected.

Callam stated, “It is our responsibility as Baptist Christians to share the pain of all who suffer and to be in solidarity with them.” He noted that “sections of the United States have suffered greatly from a series of tornadoes and flooding in recent weeks. As Baptists, it is our responsibility to pray and to help.”

Baptists across the US have responded to the series of natural disasters. Groups associated with the North American Baptist Fellowship’s (NABF) Disaster Response Network have traveled into areas affected by the deadly tornadoes and floods.

The NABF is one of six regional fellowships of the BWA.

David Goatley, executive secretary-treasurer of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention and president of the NABF, said partner churches and organizations have been asked to “gather resources.” Samuel Tolbert Jr., president of the Louisiana Home and Foreign Missions Baptist State Convention, is working closely with Lott Carey to assess immediate needs and to mobilize intermediate response to help families that have been affected.

Richard Brunson, executive director of North Carolina Baptist Men, who was a moving force behind the formation of the NABF disaster response effort, said his group is responding to tornadoes in North Carolina and Alabama.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has coordinated volunteers in two staging areas in Alabama following tornadoes and flooding in Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. Reid Doster of the state of Louisiana is serving as disaster response coordinator in the city of Joplin for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Missouri, assisting teams with cleanup efforts.

Personnel from the Office of Disaster Management of the National Baptist Convention, USA, visited disaster zones in Birmingham and Tuscaloosa, both in Alabama, and have, in partnership with the American Red Cross, helped with the delivery of goods and services.

American Baptist Churches USA’s Home Mission Societies are receiving donations and have made commitments to Joplin and Tuscaloosa. The group had previously made donations to Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, that was badly damaged by a tornado.

Other BWA member organizations connected with the NABF Disaster Response Network that are currently responding to various disasters are Converge Worldwide, the North American Baptist Conference, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Virginia Baptist Mission Board, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

“It is responses such as these that demonstrate the love and compassion of God in Christ,” Callam stated. “We assure our Baptist brothers and sisters in the United States, and indeed all Americans, that Baptists everywhere are joining you in prayer.”
Two months have passed since the occurrence of Japan’s Triple Disaster of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident on March 11. From the depths of my heart I thank all of you, my Christian brothers and sisters around the world, who have remained informed of our situation here in Japan, have faithfully continued to pray, and have sacrificially given contributions as an expression of your love and friendship.

During this time, we have watched news broadcasts of catastrophes in other countries. In the United States, many people are suffering from natural disasters such as tornadoes and floods. Also, we have watched in shock and sadness as man-made weapons have destroyed the lives of people around the globe.

Through your shining example of Christ-like love and friendship in spite of your own local problems, Japanese Christians have experienced anew the meaning of our Lord’s Great Commission to “go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature,” compounded by His words, “Blessed are the Peacemakers.” Please pray that Japanese Christians will stand firm in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus and faithfully serve both God and humanity.

Update on the Situation in Northeastern Japan

Confirmed deaths – 15,000 people
Missing – 9,500 persons
Refugees – 150,000 people

Two months after the earthquake and tsunami, searches for human remains continue. Little by little the rubble is being removed and mud is slowly being cleared away, barely making an impact on the widespread disaster region. Damage in many locations remains untouched. Temporary housing is being assembled further inland, away from the danger of tsunami along the coast. For the thousands of people connected to the fishing industry, with strong ties to the sea, efforts for relocation inland are met with resistance. These victims face a reality of continued suffering, making very little progress toward reconstruction of their lives.

Nuclear Power Plant Crisis

In spite of all efforts, problems with the crippled nuclear reactors remain unsolved, and we are learning more details of the major meltdown of one reactor. Regrettably, this accident in a nuclear power plant here in Japan is creating worldwide fear of the spread of radiation. Humans have no control over this unseen danger and cannot know the consequences. Here in this country we had been taught that this nuclear power generation would help prevent global warming, and that nuclear power would be an environmentally friendly natural source of energy. We are coming to the realization that these were false claims. We are now wondering if human overconfidence in science and technology was actually a sin of arrogance.

(Continued on next page)
People living in the 30 kilometer radius of the damaged nuclear facilities have been forced to relocate, not knowing what the next day will bring. The other day, residents forced from their homes were given permission to temporarily return to their houses one last time, wearing protective suits. These victims were only allowed two hours to take care of all their needs before being forced to permanently evacuate.

The damaged nuclear facilities are in Fukushima Province, a land bountiful in agricultural resources. The nuclear power plant was built to sustain the lifestyles and business of other people living in the distant metropolitan area, not the local residents of Fukushima. It has become evident that people near the nuclear power plant have carried a heavy burden, providing an enormous amount of electric power for the urban cities. The metropolitan residents, including the Christian churches, should be accountable for the burden they have caused.

**Japan Baptist Convention Relief Efforts**

Our emphasis during Stage One, the first month following the earthquake and tsunami, focused on prompt delivery of life-sustaining necessities for the victims. Gradually during Stage Two, we have shifted our ministry to providing simple meals as well as clearing houses filled with mud and debris. Considering the width and length of the disaster area and the multiple challenges, we have divided the region into three parts: Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima, assigning three separate teams to these localities. These teams are starting specific relief projects:

**Iwate team** – is providing basic living necessities for people whose homes were destroyed by the tsunami, and is also providing school supplies for school children.

**Miyagi team** – has begun a meal service for refugees, and is also clearing mud and debris from houses.

**Fukushima team** – has started a care ministry for people evacuated from the radiation zone. On Easter Sunday, Koriyama Baptist Church invited the children living in a nearby rescue center to come to the church. Following a fun, joyful day, their parents gratefully commented that “since the earthquake, this was the first time we have seen the children laugh!”

Some of our plans for relief work have been limited. Because there are so few convention churches in the vast disaster area, delivery of supplies and services must originate from Tokyo. Restoration of infrastructure (roads, water, electricity, gas) is slow. We are in the process of setting up a “base camp” for future volunteer workers, to accommodate an influx of volunteers during the summer vacation period.

**Prayer Requests**

Pray that the crisis at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant will be resolved as quickly as possible and that the spread of radiation will be stopped immediately. Pray for the safety and success of the many people working diligently to end this catastrophe.

Pray for the physical and emotional well-being of the children living with fear of radiation exposure.

Pray for the health of thousands of refugees suffering from this prolonged upheaval; pray that they can expect their lives to begin to mend.

Pray for the Lord Jesus to touch the grieving, broken hearts and to pour upon them an abundance of His comfort, healing, and hope.

Pray for the Christian churches of Japan as we continue to pray together that our efforts will be a positive testimony for the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness.
Several Baptist World Alliance groups provided help after a Baptist church collapsed and killed more than two dozen persons in a village in Myanmar following a severe earthquake on March 24.

The Baptist church in Kyakuni, a mostly Lahu village in eastern Shan State, near the border with Thailand, collapsed after the 6.8 magnitude quake, leaving 25 dead and 57 injured.

The relief and development arm of the BWA sent a grant of US$10,000 and the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA, sent US$5,000.

The Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) dispatched a two-member team to the different areas to do assessment. The MBC mobilized approximately US $11,000 from local churches for emergency relief, and aims to help more than 1,200 families or approximately 6,000 persons in 26 affected communities.

Christians in the area are mainly Baptists belonging to minority groups such as the Lahu, the Wa and the Shans. “There are many teenage children among the dead. The earthquake hit when they were praying,” said U Kyar Khu, the head of Kyakuni village, according to the Myanmar Times. “About 200 people were in the church at the time,” he said. “Because it is difficult to reach the road, the injured people were sent to the hospital only the next morning. Although they were in pain they were mourning the dead throughout the night.”

Kyakuni village, which was destroyed, can only be reached by motorbike in good weather. Extensive damage and fatalities were reported elsewhere. In the 50 most affected villages near the epicenter of the quake, more than 50 percent of buildings were severely damaged or destroyed.

There was extensive damage to roads and bridges, and communication was disrupted. Thirty one churches and monasteries, 11 schools, and one hospital sustained severe damage.

An undetermined number of persons died as a result of the quake, but some estimates put the death toll at more than 150.

The earthquake was felt as far away as Bangkok in Thailand and Hanoi in Vietnam.
One Baptist church has been badly damaged and a number of Baptists left homeless by the earthquake that affected Spain on May 11.

The buildings of First Baptist Church of Lorca, which was just recently constructed, and the Good Shepherd Mission, were damaged by the 5.1 temblor that caused significant localized damage in the Region of Murcia in southern Spain. “The facade and interior walls and partitions have been badly damaged,” wrote Daniel Banyuls, director of the Social Work Department of the Baptist Evangelical Union of Spain. “Our Baptist work has been seriously affected by the earthquake, but there was no personal injury.”

Baptists were left homeless by the tremor that caused panic among locals and displaced many from their homes. More than 40 families of First Baptist Church, including the pastor, lost their homes, or fled houses that were badly damaged. Some 90 percent of the congregation has been affected.

At the Good Shepherd Mission, “70 percent of the brothers are homeless after spending the first night in emergency tents,” Banyuls reported. In both congregations, members are staying with family, friends and other church members.

Banyulis expressed gratitude for the support shown by Baptists in Spain and other countries. “We continue to receive emails and telephone calls from Spain and abroad inquiring about the situation and consulting on how to help. On behalf of our churches in Lorca…thank you. We continue to pray for them.”

The Baptist Evangelical Union of Spain is a member organization of the Baptist World Alliance.

Above: Images of the new structure of First Baptist Church of Lorca in Spain that was badly damaged by an earthquake on May 11.
For a growing estimated 100 million persons worldwide, the concept of “home” is only a desperately distant idea, despite the Christian principles of sharing and charity.

Recognizing the wide disparity in resources for living in different parts of the world, the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) in 1985 urged Baptists everywhere to examine their ways of life in light of the scriptural injunctions to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, heal the sick, care for the disadvantaged, and visit the prisoners (Matthew 25:31-46).

The United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Housing (UN Human Rights Council) has declared, “The human right to adequate housing is the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity.” This right is denied more and more people in recent years as economic recession has created greater disparity between those with access to adequate housing and those with no hope of such housing.

For the period 2003-2007, an estimated three million persons were homeless in Europe, one million in France alone. The United Kingdom has more than four persons per 1,000 who are without shelter. An estimated 78 million are homeless in India, and 100,000 sleep on the streets each night in Australia.

In Brazil, experts estimate as many as 20 million persons live in hovels, under bridges and other street structures, or are squatters in clandestine rooms or properties. In Mexico City, 40 percent of the residents live in what is called “informal” housing. In Malawi, an estimated 90 percent of the urban population lives in slum conditions.

In the United States, homelessness is estimated at between 600,000 and 2.5 million persons. Among the 200,000 homeless persons in Canada, women and children are the fastest growing group.

For census purposes, only those sleeping on the streets are generally counted as homeless, indicating that insecurity regarding shelter is even more widespread than outright homelessness.

Each nation defines homelessness differently. In developed areas, some cultures may define homelessness as the state of lacking permanent, safe housing. Those living in temporary quarters or moving from shelter to shelter are considered homeless, as well as those who live on the street. In more impoverished areas, a clear definition of homelessness may be undetermined.

The causes of homelessness are as numerous as the causes of poverty generally: unemployment and underemployment; unavailability of securable affordable housing; chronic or weakening disease; substance abuse; domestic violence; forced eviction; effects of imprisonment; abuse by government or others with power; war or armed conflict; and disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes.

In Singapore, in 1986, the BWA passed a resolution commending Baptists to study and take action on homelessness through observance of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, a UN designation for 1987, and encouraged action to lessen this social problem.

The BWA has done much to address the problem of homelessness through the ministry of Baptist World Aid in the provision of shelters after major disasters and the resettlement of refugees and other displaced persons. It has, in various ways, such as through resolutions, urged churches to work tirelessly to alleviate the general effects of poverty that may also lead to homelessness.

The demand for action has not diminished, but has only grown more urgent.

BWA Statement

The Scourge of

HOMELESSNESS

The demand for action has only grown more urgent.
Baptists in Liberia are celebrating freedom while Baptists in Ghana are celebrating opportunity. This was the conclusion of Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam who visited both countries in April.

In Liberia, “I saw among them vibrant worship in the African style and great anticipation for the future,” Callam observed. “There is quite a font of optimism based on the performance of the current government and a hope that they will continue to rebuild the country, especially the devastated infrastructure.”

Callam was special guest and keynote preacher at the annual meeting of the Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention (LBMEC) held in Buchanan, Liberia’s third largest city.

He visited several Baptist institutions and expressed admiration for the rebuilding effort following the devastating civil war that affected the West African country in the 1980s and 1990s. Callam singled out Olu Menjay, a BWA vice president and principal of Rick’s Institute, the Baptist school just outside of Monrovia. “We have reason to be proud of the contribution he is making in the restoration program of the institution in introducing and maintaining quality education, commanding great respect among the people in the country.” The school became a battleground for warring troops during the civil war with
parts of the campus looted and destroyed. Thousands of displaced persons from across Liberia had moved onto the property.

“I also visited the Lott Carey Mission School where Emile Sam-Peale is doing a good job, an institution that was devastated by the war, taken over as an operational base by fighting forces,” Callam noted. “Emile and his team are doing good work, very good work. Some buildings were destroyed. When the forces were leaving they burned down the buildings.” Callam commended the United States-based Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention for its support of the Lott Carey Mission School.

“[Liberian] Baptists are concerned with the restoration of a sense of honor; of the creation of self belief that there is a future for them and that they can make it. The experience of Liberia is about the resurgence of hope, people picking up the pieces again.”

Callam visited Ghana’s capital, Accra, for the first time since he was elected BWA general secretary in that city in July 2007. He said Baptist leaders reported “growth in the churches and the enthusiasm of the youth for the things of God.” There is, he said, great “involvement of the youth in the life of the churches.”

Much of Baptist growth is in the northeast of the country. “There is great excitement about mission in Ghana, the expansion of the work and the zeal for the spread of the gospel into regions of Ghana that were neglected in the past.”

The Ghana Baptist Convention (GBC) is going through a period of restructuring in its leadership. “They are trying to develop a new way of understanding the role of the general secretary that would combine spiritual values and administrative functions into one consolidated office to be truly representative of the Ghana convention.”

Callam spoke at two churches in Accra, Legon Baptist Church and First Baptist Church in Tema.

He was accompanied on his trips by Emmett Dunn, director of the BWA Youth Department, who is originally from Liberia.
Baptists in Uruguay celebrated the 100th anniversary of Baptist witness in the South American country in May.

The main events were held during the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Baptist Evangelical Convention of Uruguay on May 13 and 14.

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam was the main speaker.

Callam urged Baptists to renew the passion for studying God’s Word, to rediscover the vitality and power of collective prayer, and to renew their commitment to exercising service to the community.

Speaking on the topic, “Toward a Vibrant Future,” the BWA leader declared that “followers of Jesus Christ need to spend more time studying the word of God,” and to expend greater effort “in mining the treasures of God’s word and reaping the rich benefit that awaits us.” Studying the scriptures, Callam declared, has led to spiritual revivals and awakenings in the church, as experienced in the United States in the 1730s and 40s and the late 1850s to the early 1900s. “I urge you to intensify your program to promote Bible reading and study as an intentional part of your churches’ life.”

Callam also said that a rediscovery of prayer in the life of the believer and of the church is of vital importance. “In the capacity in which I serve, I visit with Baptists all over the world. I notice that in many places where the church has grown by leaps and bounds, one major factor is the cultivation of a rich prayer life among the faithful.” Callam cited the cases of Nigeria in West Africa where there are more than one million Baptists, and that of South Korea in East Asia, “where the church has grown by leaps and bounds.”

Callam said that, even at the Baptist-owned Bowen University in Nigeria, “the first activity scheduled to take place on the day of the commencement event [that I attended] was a prayer meeting attended by the Council of the University!” “In Korea,” Callam informed the gathering, “thousands of believers are in church very early in the morning several days of the week united in prayer, calling upon God, offering praise, seeking guidance, making intercession for people in need.”

The BWA General Secretary also encouraged Uruguay Baptists to “renew your engagement in the life of the world.” Drawing on examples he has encountered in other countries, Callam noted that while Baptist Christians have devoted “much time to the spiritual needs of the communities that they serve, the churches are reaching out to the community in other ways,” such as in opening and running schools, skills training centers, health and dental clinics and hospitals, and in giving attention to the poor and to sustainable community development. “We cannot lock ourselves behind the doors of the church. Ours is the calling to get involved in our communities,” Callam stated.

A special conference and fellowship lunch for pastors, their spouses and all church workers were also held to mark the 100th anniversary celebrations during the annual meeting.

In April, BWA President John Upton used the opportunity of attending a summit of presidents and executive secretaries of the Union of Baptists in Latin America in Montevideo, to mark the occasion of centenary observance. Upton spoke at a special worship service on April 15 and met the vice president of Uruguay, Danilo Astori, on the previous day.

“Baptists in Uruguay are a small minority,” Callam recounted following the trip. “But in their celebration, the Baptists are saying ‘God is with us, God has been with us.’”

“Being a small union they are without a general secretary, and there are some needs that they have,” Callam surmised. “The seminary is in great need of help, the library holdings are minimal. But they are taking monumental steps to address the challenges they face. Baptists are encouraged to pray and offer their assistance.”

There are approximately 6,000 Baptists in 67 churches in Uruguay, commonly regarded as the most secular country in Latin America.
We pray for peace.

The observance carried significance for Christians around the world, and was especially important as the day fell during the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, held in Kingston, Jamaica, from May 17-25. Burchell Taylor, a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, represented the BWA at the convocation that drew approximately 1,000 participants from around the world.

Inasmuch as the BWA has been an advocate for peace many times over many decades, the BWA viewed it as an appropriate observance. As several countries in the Middle East and North Africa are experiencing turmoil at this time, the BWA encourages our Baptist churches to follow up on a 1981 BWA resolution that called “on Baptists in every land to pray for peace in the Near and Middle East.”

In response to the accumulation of powerful weapons that are capable of widespread destruction and devastation, the BWA, in another 1981 resolution, urged its member bodies to “take responsibility within their own nations and states to preserve and propagate peace and to effect the reduction and ultimate cessation of armaments, both conventional and nuclear.”

Furthermore, in 1982, the BWA urged “that peaceful means be used by national Baptist bodies to influence national governments toward peace and disarmament” and that “the world Baptist community will accept courageously its Christian calling as peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).”

The BWA’s consistent call and work for peace should be sufficient encouragement to Baptists to see peacemaking and peace building as a vocational calling.

There are a number of initiatives taken by Baptists that serve as example and inspiration and which the BWA commends to Baptists. These include the work of the All Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship in its efforts to promote peace in West Africa. The youth group, among other things, held conferences and workshops on Peace and Conflict Resolution in Africa in Ghana in October 2008 and in Sierra Leone in November 2009. The conferences drew participants from countries that have been affected by internal conflicts and civil wars and focused on the ways youth can contribute to the peace process in their countries.

Another source of inspiration are the efforts of Wati Aier, principal of the Oriental Theological Seminary in Dimapur, Nagaland state, India, who, for almost two decades, worked for peace in Nagaland. His efforts led to the formation of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation in 2008, which held more than 60 meetings between rival armed factions, resulting in a reduction in attacks and violence following the signing of the Covenant of Reconciliation in June 2009 and a high level meeting of the leaders of the Naga factions in September 2010.

Groups and persons such as the All Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship and Wati Aier live out the 2008 BWA resolution “encouraging dialogue between different faith and ethnic groups to promote peace and harmony in society.” They “exemplify the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ and, as reconciled people, [are fulfilling] a ministry of reconciliation in the world.”

We pray for peace.

Top: Some of the approximately 1,000 participants who attended the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in May.
International Ecumenical Peace Convocation

By Burchell Taylor

One thousand delegates from more than 80 countries representing 300 member-communions of the World Council of Churches (WCC) gathered at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, from May 17-24, 2011, for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation. It was my privilege to be the representative of the Baptist World Alliance as Observer Delegate.

The convocation met under the theme, “Glory to God and Peace on Earth.” This theme truly inspired and captured the imagination of everyone as reflected in the presentations, discussions, reflections and final declaration. It was observed that the convocation was taking place at the end of the Decade to Overcome Violence, an initiative of the WCC. The positive accomplishments of the decade were noted and celebrated in stories and testimonies from all over the world, and some were truly dramatic. Failures, shortcomings, frustrations, resistance and struggles were lamented as entrenched powers and forces were noted to have made life difficult as far as peacemaking efforts and the call and work for justice were concerned in some places. It was also noted that fresh threats to peace, both in individual places and in relation to the global community, were on the horizon. There was no doubt however that the promise-gift and vocation of peace and peacemaking had to be pursued resolutely and with renewed vigor.

All of these were reflected in the worship events, prayer sessions, buzz groups and plenaries. It was awe-inspiring to sense the strong bonding displayed and experienced by persons of different confessions of faith, ethnic groups, cultures, generations and race. Twelve percent of the delegates were youth and they expressed the desire that at the next convocation at least 25 percent should be youth. Judging from their passion and insights, it was heartening to feel that the hope for peace on earth is very much alive. This was embodied in the final message. It called for dedication to the journey of peace. Four areas in particular were named: peace in the community; peace with the earth; peace in the market place; and peace among peoples.

With so many conflicts in the world having religious associations and connections, one wonders if it should not have been given an independent focus along with the aforementioned focus areas. Nonviolence is seen as the desirable mode of effecting, defending and sustaining peace. It is borne in mind that this is the chosen path of Christ, who died on the Cross and “told us to lay aside our swords, taught us to love our enemies and was resurrected from the dead,” as stated in the final message of the convocation.

There was much literature available for free distribution. These covered a variety of work being done in peacemaking as well as topics on peace and related issues. Many benefited from this and were introduced to other resources that are available and where and how they can be accessed.

Baptists were present from various parts of the world and some played leading roles in presentations and discussions. Jamaican Baptists were also very much in evidence. Two of the site visits made to projects in Kingston that were peace-related were ones sponsored by the Jamaica Baptist Union Mission Agency, an after school learning center in a politically volatile area and a farming project in a very depressed inner-city community. The former was opened and dedicated on the eve of the convocation with WCC officials participating. A final contribution was made by the WCC toward the building of housing for the center. The farming project which has caught the interest of many has been presented to Baptist World Aid for assistance toward the establishment of a greenhouse, and a promise has been made for funding in 2012. One of the workshops at the convocation was devoted to the work of a local Baptist church in community transformation and development.

The Sunday worship on World Peace Day on May 22, which was also designated Caribbean Day, saw the participation of the Bethel Steel Orchestra. The preacher was the writer of this report. It was an occasion of very rich and moving celebrations.

A very interesting feature of the convocation was a symposium on the life and work of Phillip Potter, a Caribbean man and distinguished World Church statesman. His contribution to world peace and efforts at peacemaking were especially noted. Local Baptist scholars also played a significant role in this.

The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation was a significant event. It was not only a reminder of the possibilities and necessities of peacemaking but also the ongoing challenges that are always present. The theme, “Glory to God and Peace on Earth,” remains an unceasing source of hope in the name, grace and power of the Father, Son and Spirit.
In Memoriam

Andreas Kogoya,
general secretary of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches of Papua (FBCP) in Indonesia, died on May 6 from heart complications. He was 43 years old.

Kogoya became general secretary of FBCP and pastor of the Baptist church in Mount Wachno Kotaraja, Jayapura, in West Papua, in 2002, and served in both positions until the time of his death.

He started his involvement in ministry when he was in his teen years, began working with the FBCP shortly after his theological studies, and was eventually appointed as assistant general secretary.

As a child, his family got caught up in the fight for self-determination in Papua. During the war between the Indonesian military and the Free Papua Movement, which began in 1977 and lasted into the 1980s, the Indonesian military and local militia backed by the military set fire to his village, from which the family escaped.

Kogoya earned degrees and diplomas from the Jayapura Baptist Theological Institute.

He leaves wife, Esther Wenda, and three sons, Charles (12), Endrikus (7), and Krisman (5).

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John Jonsson,
a past president of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and the South African Baptist Missionary Society, died on May 26, in Johannesburg, at the age of 86.

The son of Lutheran missionary parents, Jonsson was baptized in the Central Baptist Church in Durban at 18 years old. He earned degrees and diplomas from Spurgeon’s College and the University of London in the United Kingdom, and at the University of Natal in South Africa. He pastored churches in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

Jonsson, a noted theologian, was principal of the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa in Johannesburg from 1966-1971 and was lecturer at Witwatersrand University from 1971-1975 and the University of Natal from 1976-1981. He co-founded Treverton College, an independent, co-educational, inter-denominational Christian school founded on a Baptist heritage in the South African small town of Mooi River.

He became active in the anti-apartheid movement and ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the South African parliament in 1977.

Jonsson moved to the United States in 1982 and filled the W.O. Carver Chair as professor of Christian Missions and World Religions at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He left for Baylor University (BU) in Texas in 1992 to become professor of religion and director of the African Studies program. He retired from this position in 2002 and returned to South Africa. An annual lecture, the John N. Jonsson Peace and Justice Lecture Series, is held in his honor at BU.

In 1985, he signed the Kairos Document, which called on all churches to demand that the government give equal rights to all South Africans. As a result, the government took away his passport, and from 1985 to 1989, he was not allowed to enter South Africa.

He is a former member of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Christian Ethics, the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on Baptists Against Racism, and the World Evangelization Strategy Workgroup.


He leaves wife, Gladys, and children, Lois, Sylvia, and Sven. He was predeceased by a son, David, in 1963.

Funeral services were held on June 3 at Rosebank Union Church in Hurlingham, a suburb of Johannesburg.

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Antonio Miguel Goncalves Pires,
former president of the Portuguese Baptist Convention (PBC) and president of the Evangelical Alliance of Portugal, died on May 7, shortly before his 51st birthday.

Pires was born to Portuguese missionary parents in Angola in West Africa, and later served as a missionary in Mozambique in southeastern Africa from 1993 to 1999. He had returned to Portugal as a 14 year old and, several years later, answered a call to the Christian ministry. He played an integral role in helping to integrate immigrants from Eastern European countries, such as from Ukraine and Moldova, into the PBC.

Pires was executive secretary of the PBC youth program from 1984 to 1990, and was a member of the Executive of the European Baptist Federation Youth Committee from 1988 to 1991. He was PBC president from 2002-2008, and was a former member of the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance.

He earned degrees and diplomas from the Baptist Theological Seminary in Queluz in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area of Portugal, and was pastor of the Baptist church in Queluz.

He is survived by wife, Isabel, and children, Jonathan, David and Priscilla.

Funeral services were held on May 9 in Queluz.
The stories of pioneering missionaries from out of North America and Europe are well known. Not so those from the Two Thirds World. There is a glaring knowledge gap that needs to be filled. As such, the due regard that should be given to missionaries from out of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America is often withheld, sometimes deliberately, more often from lack of knowledge and awareness.

The biography of Jamaican Terrence Duncanson is an attempt to help fill this knowledge gap. The narrative, as told by Horace Russell, who can be termed the father of Caribbean church history and historical theology, serves not only to honor the memory of a pioneering missionary, but to remind those who forgot, and to inform those who do not know.

The tale of the missionary to Panama is remarkable: A man who did and accomplished much, but who experienced many setbacks and had serious doubts along the way. A man who, in his life and ministry, gave clear demonstration of God’s call on his life, but who had episodes of the dark night of the soul, sometimes questioning that call.

Duncanson’s story is at one and the same time the story of the Kingston Earthquake of 1907, the construction of the Panama Canal from the perspective of immigrant workers, and even that of the United Fruit Company. More so, it offers important details on the early beginnings of Baptist witness in the Central American country, and it is a lesson on how to minister among an immigrant population facing every difficulty imaginable.

Russell’s book is a timely reminder that Baptists from the Two Thirds World have many stories to tell, and he has set an example with a fulsome narrative that details faithful commitment in the face of much hardship and tragedy.


The report of the 20th Baptist World Congress in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, has been published.

More than 5,300 persons from 105 countries registered for the congress, which was held at the Hawai‘i Convention Center from July 28 to August 1, 2010. Titled, *Hear the Spirit: The Official Report of the Twentieth Baptist World Congress*, the book-length report offers details of the events and includes Bible studies and full texts of the sermons that were delivered by the main plenary speakers.

An overview section observes that a number of persons described the congress as an “empowering experience,” as a “wonderful fellowship,” as “refreshing,” and as providing “great memories.” The overview highlights the preaching and the International Music Fest as particularly inspirational and memorable for many of those who attended.

Other activities emphasized are the Focus Group meetings on theological, ethical and social issues that affect Baptist believers or to which Baptists are called to give attention; the children’s and youth programs; the Mission in Action projects; the men’s and women’s rallies; and the Living Water celebration, which culminated a five-year program of training in leadership and evangelism.

Edited by Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam, the book is available for purchase at Amazon.com.
I have been told there is a golf course in India that had a major issue with monkeys roaming the property. Actually, it was reported that there was an infestation of monkeys on the courses. Golfers would hit the ball only to have the monkeys pick up the ball after it landed and toss it around. Sometimes they would throw it in the rough or sometimes carry it into the woods. Occasionally, they would even throw it on the fairway or green, creating a major concern for opponents of the golfer.

The golf course tried to get rid of the monkeys. They built fences with barbed wire barriers on top. That didn’t work. Then they hired a company to catch them and carry them back into the jungle from which they came. Unfortunately, the monkeys knew their way back to the golf course all too well and soon returned. They returned in even larger numbers bringing others with them. It was evident the golf course was not going to get rid of them.

Finally, the club managers gave up trying to remove the monkeys. Instead, they decided to make a rule of golf unique to that particular course. The rule was: “Play the ball wherever the monkey drops it.”

We make our best shot in life. We hit it faithfully and straight but life and circumstances come along like a monkey and swoop up the ball and drop it where we didn’t expect. We have to start from there.

Living is a journey. Ministry is a journey. It’s always a leaving and a moving on and all along encountering and learning. It is about being changed. It is frequently about finding ourselves in circumstances not of our choosing. There seems to never be enough resources or leaders or commitments among church members. Conflict seems to find its way into our fellowships all too easily. Sometimes there is no sense of clarity about what to do. There is a sense of being lost, of much ambiguity, and too little comfort for now. I hear from many that this seems to be a long season of waiting.

I don’t think this is really all that new for God’s people. It has been our history really. Liberated slaves trekked 40 years through the wilderness. That’s not exactly what freedom meant to them back in Egypt. Soon they were asking to be slaves again. Exiles in Babylon ached for the journey back home. Soon they were labeled with the moniker “Christians” we called ourselves “people of the way.” We always knew we were going somewhere and that Christ would lead us. Unfortunately, that seems to have been forgotten by many these days.

This is what faith is though. It is the not knowing our future but walking toward it, trusting that God’s faithfulness is going to meet us there, and in fact, is with us every step of the way. And steps we must take. Sometimes we don’t have a choice. Something happens or something that needed to happen doesn’t happen and we are in a difficult and sometimes painful situation. We find ourselves facing a future we hadn’t counted on, uncertainties everywhere and very little comfort to get us through the nights and through the days.

Sometimes life presents us with more of a choice than that. A door opens before us to do something we probably ought to do, to undertake some new difficult endeavor, to take some kind of stand, to say some words we probably should say, to risk something big, to give something big, but we are anxious about it because we can’t see what’s going to happen when we’ve done it. It comes down then to the not knowing and trusting the one who said he will be with us always.

Regarding all this, I have found renewed inspiration lately. I have seen in the past few months those who have kept going and keep going to this day. In Montevideo, Uruguay, I had the opportunity to meet with the national leadership of the Latin American Baptist conventions. While there we also celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Uruguay Baptist Convention. The leadership of Baptists in both Uruguay and Latin America was so impressive. In fact, on my first day in Montevideo, several of us met with the vice president of Uruguay, Mr. Astori. The meeting was a memory I’ll carry for the rest of my life. The vice president knew of the spirit of the Baptists in his country and across Latin America and verbally expressed his thankfulness for them, giving thanks for their character, evangelical heart, and sense of justice.

It was the very next week that I had opportunity to be with a gathering of Baptists in the Central Region of the United States. They were a part of the American Baptist Churches, USA. They were ready for a fresh word from God on how to keep going when society and church are in such flux and change. There was a spirit in these two meetings that awakened something within me. Let me try to explain it.

The spirit was one of “anticipation” of what God was going to do. Yes, there were difficulties and challenges shared, but the commitment was strong to stay true to the mission. There also was a spirit of “blessing” among the leadership. They celebrated one another’s victories and encouraged one another. That is so opposite of what I often see. I see frequently a spirit of suspicion rather than blessing. Suspicion that comes from fear and insecurity and diminishes community faster than anything I know. I have been inspired by my friends in Latin America and in the Midwest of the United States to challenge suspicion when I experience it and to invite those who are stalled on their journey to liberate themselves by giving those of whom they are suspicious a blessing instead. Jesus said it more bluntly. We are to love our enemies. Also, it is so easy to do so much “remembering” that we never do any “anticipating.” Without anticipation we become stalled and eventually discouraged.

I guess I am learning we are never too old or never too young or in-between to embrace some marvelous new insecurity and to embrace new steps of risk called faith.

And it never ends, thank the Lord, it never ends. May your life and your faith never cease to be pilgrimage, never get finished taking new steps of risking faith. Don’t be afraid of the future that God does inhabit. Uncertain as all our tomorrows may be, we lift up our hearts on this good, great journey that is taking us home. No monkeys can ever change that.

Thank You Baptists in Latin America and Baptists in Kansas, USA
Recent Books from the BWA

**Baptist Faith & Witness: Papers of the Study & Research Division of the BWA 2005-2010**
Edited by Fausto A. Vasconcelos

**Hear the Spirit: The Official Report of the Twentieth Baptist World Congress, Baptist World Alliance**
Edited by Neville Callam

**A Celebration of Christian Service: Reflections from the BWA Staff**
Edited by Eron Henry
Contains reflections on aspects of the ministry of the BWA

**Baptists Against Racism: Reflections at the End of a Decade**
Edited by Neville Callam and Julie Justus
A compendium of statements against racism issued by the BWA over the years, published to mark the end of the Decade Against Racism and Ethnic Conflict

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Essential stories and reflections published in Baptist World during the current quinquennium

**Pursuing Unity and Defending Rights in the Baptist World Alliance**
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