BAPTISTS
Politically Engaged
BWA Director Receives Special Award

Rothangliani Chhangte, director of Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance® (BWA), is the 2013 recipient of the Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award.

The award gives recognition to an American Baptist Church USA member who has made outstanding contribution in ecumenical work at the local, state, national or international level. It was presented at the Christian Unity Dinner on June 21, during the American Baptist Mission Summit/Biennial in Overland Park, Kansas.

Chhangte, prior to joining the BWA staff on August 1, 2012, served ABCUSA as ecumenical officer where she represented that body on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Churches Together (CCT), the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) and the BWA.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam expressed his delight at learning “of the decision of ABCUSA to honor Rothang with the Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award. Rothang is a thoughtful theologian who has a good grasp of the ecumenical dimensions of the Christian vocation.”

Callam said that Chhangte’s ecumenical experience has been of great benefit to the BWA. “She has brought to her work as director of Baptist World Aid a positive appreciation of the need to develop and maintain relationships of mutual trust and respect with other Christian communions within the universal church. I am not surprised that recognition is being given to the understanding, commitment and enthusiasm she brings to partnering with fellow Christians, and the churches to which they belong, in the one mission that God in Christ has entrusted to the church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As a representative to the WCC while at ABCUSA, Chhangte was instrumental in the implementation of the Decade to Overcome Violence in the United States. She was very involved in reviving and supporting youth and young adult participation in WCC events in the US.

She was a member of the Steering Committee that led to the formation of CCT as an expanded ecumenical table and which led ABCUSA to become a founding member.

Chhangte served on the Executive Committee of the NCC where she made significant contributions to the functioning of the Council and its emphasis upon justice and as co-chair of the NCC Interfaith Commission.

She worked on staff with American Baptist Home Mission Societies, the domestic mission arm of ABCUSA, as liaison to the Myanmar refugee community in the US. She resigned that position after being named director of BWAid in 2012.

The Luke Mowbray Ecumenical Award was established in 1975 at the request of Edna Mowbray, in memory of her late husband to recognize the commitment to achieve Christian unity.
15 Young Nepal Leader Takes on Challenge to Train Pastors

16 Azerbaijan

18 Syria

21 USA: What Kind of Church Member Am I?

23 Catholic Church: From Benedict XVI to Francis

24 BWA News Highlights

29 In Memoriam

29 Book Notes


Respected Baptist historian Harry Leon McBeth passed away in May and Baptists around the world expressed their appreciation for McBeth’s scholarship, which has helped clarify dimensions of the story of Baptists.

Former chair of the Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission, Karen Bullock, described McBeth as a “faithful follower of Jesus Christ, beloved champion of the church, gifted storyteller, and eminent historian” who championed the voiceless and faceless. She also praised McBeth as a model of Christian dignity and a champion on the pages of Baptist heritage.

In one of his significant works, The Baptist Heritage (Broadman Press, 1987), McBeth explains that: “The doctrinal framework for Baptists was not erected in a day; the Baptist faith was not born full-blown.” It emerged over time as Baptists sought to respond to the setting in which they lived and served.

Concerning the attitude of Baptists to government, McBeth characterized 17th century British Baptists as reflecting different points on a spectrum. Some General Baptists, he said, exhibited “hostility toward civil government” and did not allow government officials to hold membership in their churches. Others would “admit magistrates into membership provided they not attempt to exercise authority in the church.” Meanwhile, McBeth said, Particular Baptists gave “high value to political loyalty and patriotic participation in civil affairs” and “many of their leaders were involved to some extent in government service.”

Over the years, not surprisingly, Baptist commitment to advancing the welfare of people has found expression in a number of their members seeking and occupying political office. With varying degrees of success, these persons have used the opportunity of public office to advance social reconstruction in ways that are consistent with the values derived from their faith.

In the United Kingdom, several Baptists have served in parliament. During the last century alone, David Lloyd George, John Hinds, William John and Alfred Thomas, all of whom also served as president of the Baptist Union of Wales, occupied political office. Three members of the British parliament – Cyril Black, George White and Ernest Brown – served in the position of president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

Elsewhere in contemporary Europe, Pavlo Unguryan of Ukraine and Valeriu Ghiletchi of Moldova, a former president of the European Baptist Church, hold political office in their respective countries.

Some United States presidents are said to have been Baptists when they entered the White House. These include Warren Harding, Harry Truman, William Clinton and, of course, Jimmy Carter. Recently, President Carter assured me that, as often as possible, he continues to teach his Sunday School class at the Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia, US. Former US Vice Presidents Nelson Rockefeller and Al Gore also have known association with the Baptist church.

Members of the Baptist community in Latin America have held political office in their countries. These include Carlos Garcia Garcia in Peru, Victor Marinuena in Ecuador, and Walter Pinheiro and Eraldo Tinoco in Brazil. In the Caribbean, John Maxwell Sr., Maxine Henry Wilson and Clifton Stone have served in the Jamaican national parliament. Meanwhile, among the large number of politicians with Baptist roots in the Baptist community in Bahamas are former Member of Parliament and Governor General Clifford Darling, former Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham, and Rome Italia Johnson, first female speaker of the House of Assembly in the Bahamas.

Many African politicians have undisputed Baptist origins – whether it is Lott Carey in Liberia or David George in Sierra Leone. Liberia itself produced William Tolbert, a former BWA president, and, in Nigeria, the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, and many other politicians such as Olorunimbe Mamora, Emmanuel Uduaghan and Dawari George, who has served as president of the Men’s Missionary Union of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, are Baptists. In Ghana, Baptists who have held ministerial positions in the government include Christiana Amoako-Nuamah and Joe Oteng Adjei, and in the Sierra Leone government, Alimamy Philip Koroma.

In the Asia Pacific region, Baptists have played a role in several governments. In India, Reishand Keishing from Manipur, and Rano Shaiza and S. C. Jamir from Nagaland are well known Baptists. Yukio Hatoyama, a former president of Japan was also a Baptist. In Australia, politicians of Baptist persuasion include Thomas Playford, who served in parliament, and Athol Townley who was a minister of government and also Peter Costello. Current Australian Prime Minister Julie Gillard, whose parents are Baptists famously said, “I was brought up in the Baptist church but, during my adult life, I’ve … found a different path. I’m of course a great respecter of religious beliefs, but they’re not my beliefs.”

Of course, the Baptists to whom we have referred in this column were chosen at random. Many others have served, or continue to serve, as parliamentarians in the countries mentioned. Still many others serve in a similar way in other countries.

Whether they have served as politicians, as civil servants, or as volunteers in civic groups committed to meeting human need, defending the rights of people and fostering respect for the environment – Baptists, like so many other Christians and other people of faith, continue to contribute in important ways to the betterment of life in community.

If, at one time, many Baptists were rightly characterized as hostile to the idea of fellow Baptists participating in government, with the passage of time, this is increasingly not the case. McBeth’s reference to the emergence over time of Baptist positions on Christians’ participation in politics and government is uncontroversial. These changes represent something to celebrate.
WILLIAM TOLBERT:

HEAD OF CHURCH & COUNTRY

Of Baptists who have been politically engaged, most prominent within the Baptist World Alliance® family was William Tolbert, president of the BWA from 1965-1970 and president of Liberia between 1971 and 1980.

Tolbert was pastor of the Zion Praise Baptist Church in Bensonville, Liberia, and was elected president of the Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention in 1958. He first served as the BWA vice president from 1960-65. He then became the first African to be elected to the position of BWA president in 1965.

He entered the government service of Liberia in 1936, working in the Treasury Department. He served eight years in the House of Representatives beginning in 1943 and was elected vice president of the West African country in 1952. Voted in as Liberian president in 1971, he was overthrown by a military coup and shot to death on April 12, 1980.

While president of Liberia, Tolbert told the National Press Club in the United States that the church has a role to play in making the world what it ought to be. “Nothing can any longer deter [persons from seeking] to secure their God-given dignity and inherent rights,” he said.

The church has a role to play in making the world what it ought to be.

Left: Portrait of William Tolbert at the international offices of the BWA
By Kakule Molo

The separation between church and politics is a basic principle deriving from the very beginning of the Anabaptist movement in the course of the Reformation of the 16th century initiated by Martin Luther. While many Baptist churches are still committed to that tradition, others have developed alternative approaches in the light of political developments that have occurred in their respective countries. Increasingly Baptist lay leaders and to a lesser extent clergy, are engaged in the political sphere. The rationale often heard in some circles is that: “if we do not take care of politics, politics will take care of us.” This means that if politics is left in the hands of people who are not enlightened by the Word of God, there should be little surprise when things go wrong in society.

Another approach from many Baptist churches and individuals is that they should limit their role to reminding those in power to faithfully carry out their political duties and to educating citizens to keep those in politics in check. But such an exercise hardly bears immediate fruit, especially in societies where the culture of democracy has not yet taken root and corruption is widely practiced. Therefore, it appears that given a diversity of political contexts, no single approach seems to be applicable in all cases.

The principle of the separation between church and state needs to be kept in balance. Irresponsible politicians should not take this to mean that the church is to have no say with regard to their political duties. Being part of society, the church has the right to speak to issues that may have an impact on it. Conversely, the state should not interfere in ordinary church matters that have no implication on the national legal system or on public order.

The context of the 16th century that led Baptists to distance themselves from any political engagement has changed. In several countries where people are still experiencing political instability, more and more voices are encouraging Christians to enter into politics. At the same time, they are aware that in many countries, a number of those in power recognize themselves as Christians. But what they mean is that people with good Christian testimony should be engaged in politics as an active witness to the truth and the justice of the Gospel as expressed in John 8:32: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,” and in Proverb 14:34: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.” Baptists need to understand that they have such a calling to witness to the truth and justice in the political arena.

Baptists’ engagement in politics is to be seen as both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity because it is a calling from the very people Baptists serve daily, both spiritually and physically. At the same time, it proves to be a challenge because politics is a realm where danger lurks, where power and some practices contradict an authentic Christian life.

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Being part of society, the church has the right to speak to issues that may have an impact on it.

In my own experience in the parliament of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I felt very often that some plans of the ruling majority to which my party belonged were in contradiction with my Christian belief. This put me in an awkward position against my own party which I was supposed to defend. But the most painful experience was that when the promises of the government were not fulfilled, the members of the parliament who had the obligation to visit regularly their voters were held responsible and even taken for liars. Such a situation was embarrassing to me as a Christian and pastor to the point that I ended up by deciding not to run for a second term. Surprisingly many people saw in my decision, the risk of leaving political affairs in the hands of people who have no fear of God. They felt that political changes in the Congo have more chance to occur if true believers would come to power or at least would be present in political structures.

I was left with the understanding that despite the embarrassment and disappointment Christians may experience in their political engagement, average citizens, who are mostly the victims of evil political structures, set their hopes for a better future on these Christian politicians. Baptists should consider heeding such calling without compromising the essentials of their Baptist identity.

Kakule Molo is president of the Baptist Church in Central Africa in the Democratic Republic of Congo and a former elected Member of Parliament in that country.
During the time of the Soviet Union, Christians had no status in Moldova. This never settled well with me. I always knew that Christians have something unique to offer to the society. In my youth I had a dream to get involved in the political life of the country, to bring the Light of the Gospel to the highest ranking officials.

Moldova gained its independence following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1998, when the opportunity to run for the parliament in Moldova presented itself, I prayed to God for His will to come. He clearly spoke to me by opening the door and telling me to go through it. The word of God written in Joshua motivated me: “I will give you every place where you set your foot.” Joshua himself represented a great leadership example. I knew I had to follow. I realized then that Christians had to fight for God’s glory in every area of life, including the political sphere.

The very beginning of the parliamentary session involved a very heated discussion around the law for religious freedom, specifically an article forbidding proselytism. The Council of Europe asked us to either remove this article or to give a clear definition of its meaning. The pressure from the Orthodox Church was colossal. They wanted people’s right to convert to another religion forbidden by law (the Orthodox Church represents roughly 93 percent of the Moldovan population). If this were to happen, we would have encountered great barriers in preaching the Gospel. As a member of the Committee for Human Rights and Religious Freedom, I helped bring leaders of different religious groups together to discuss this issue. As a result of this roundtable and other debates, the parliament defined proselytizing as using force and violence when trying to convert people to another religion. This was acceptable to us since we do not use force or violence in preaching the Gospel.

One other accomplishment of that first Parliament found its inspiration in a trip I took to the USA. After being invited to participate at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC, I was motivated to start a prayer group in the Moldovan Parliament. A group of members of parliament would meet on a regular basis to have breakfast and study the Word of God. A while later one of the MPs came to know God with his entire family, while another MP’s wife and son joined our church. Testimonies like these, were clear examples that Christians should be involved in public service.

For the next eight years Moldova faced rough economic times under communist rule. Moldova’s history is similar to Israel’s history in that it took God one night to take Israel out of Egypt, but then it took God 40 years to take Egypt out of them. Moldova has been an independent country for 20 years but unfortunately, it is still fighting the syndrome of wanting to go back to the Soviet Union. In 2009, after being out of the political life for a while I felt God opening another door. I decided to run again, and God granted another victory.

Personally, this parliamentary session was characterized by a focus on promoting moral and spiritual values in the public sphere. I advocated for instituting a national Family Day, which the Parliament did. Thus, on May 15 of every year the country celebrates the national Family Day. I succeeded also in promoting an evangelical curriculum for religion that is taught in public schools.

Political life is not without challenges. One of the challenges was when the parliament, at the recommendation of the European Union, decided to adopt an antidiscrimination bill that would grant equal rights to sexual minorities. I was the only one from our political group that voted against this piece of legislation. Despite its adoption, together with a group of Christian lawyers we managed to amend it to protect families, child adoption, churches and theological schools.

Over the last four years God also gave me the chance to be involved with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Being among some of the most influential politicians of the European continent, there was an opportunity to once again promote Christian values, advocate for religious freedom in European countries and countries in the Middle East.

Being among some of the most influential politicians of the European continent, there was an opportunity to once again promote Christian values, advocate for religious freedom in European countries and adjacent areas in Morocco and countries in the Middle East. In the fall of 2011, a written declaration in support of the Iranian Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was registered. Recently, PACE adopted a resolution based on the report that I presented, “Fighting child sex tourism.” Now I am working on another important report titled “Tackling intolerance with a special view to Christianity.”

(Continued on next page)
In 2008, for the first time in the history of Ukraine, a prayer group began in the Ukrainian Parliament that was initiated by Christian politicians from the USA and Germany. Each Thursday Members of Parliament who are Christians meet in a room above the session hall to read the Bible, pray and discuss spiritual principles that are the foundation for the success of any country.

This prayer group has been meeting for five years now uniting approximately 15 Members of Parliament from different parties. The group is coordinated by the young and active 33 year old Christian and Member of Parliament Pavel Unguryan, who currently heads the Foreign Mission Committee of the All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. During his seven-year leadership in the Baptist youth ministry of Ukraine, Unguryan has become known for his leadership and management skills of large-scale projects, including youth congresses, nationwide campaigns, missionary projects and international forums.

The activity of the parliamentary prayer group spread rapidly and became a powerful movement for the implementation of Christian initiatives at government level and across the country. The members of the prayer group held a campaign to distribute Bibles in the Parliament of Ukraine where some communist symbols haven’t been completely removed. More than 300 parliamentarians have received Bibles.

The next step was the establishment of National Prayer Breakfasts that are a long standing tradition for many democratic countries. For four consecutive years this spiritual event is held in the Ukraine under the auspices of the chairman of the Parliament. It brings together Members of Parliament and government officials from different countries, the leadership of Christian churches and the public sector. These National Breakfasts serve as a place for spiritual unity and fellowship of politicians from different political parties.

For five consecutive years Ukrainian parliamentarians and state officials under the leadership of Unguryan have participated in the US National Prayer Breakfast with President Obama. Such Prayer Breakfasts are now taking place in other countries in the European Union, which Ukrainian delegations gladly attend.

The prayer group established cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on issues of human rights, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy in Ukraine. 

The group’s prayer meetings have become the platform for dialogue and communication between politicians from opposing political forces. Through spiritual values, prayer group members were able not only to establish communication between political opponents, but also to unite them around important public and social issues, including the protection of spiritual and moral values.

The parliamentary prayer group has become the spiritual and ideological core for the creation of the Inter-Factional Parliamentary Group “For spirituality, morality and health of Ukraine” that united 67 parliamentarians from all factions of the parliament. Unguryan has been chosen as a chairman of the Inter-Factional Parliamentary Group.

“Nowadays we witness the increase of negative phenomena in Ukrainian society: rapidly growing alcoholism, drug addiction and suicide. Morality, spirituality and Biblical family values are in serious decline,” Unguryan says. “All this causes a great concern for the future of the state and the young generation. The state programs are largely ineffective because they are aimed to
remove the effects of the problems and not its cause. But the root of all these problems is the spiritual impoverishment of society and the loss of Christian standards taught and proclaimed by Jesus Christ.”

From the time of its formation the Inter-Factional Parliamentary Group identified two major foci for its activities. First, to set up a clear legislative block against all kinds of evil that penetrate Ukraine from outside. This includes placing a ban on all immorality on the web and on TV; counteracting children’s alcoholism, drug abuse and smoking; addressing high suicide rates among young people; and reducing the unbelievable number of abortions, particularly among young women.

Second, the Inter-Factional Parliamentary Group strives to work closely on bills that promote moral, spiritual, and physical health of people, especially the younger generation and contribute to the normal and harmonious wellbeing of the Ukrainian people.

Within the framework of the Inter-Factional Parliamentary Group a number of resonant bills have been adopted that seek to increase the excise taxes on alcohol and tobacco products and ban the advertisement of these products. Laws have been adopted against the dissemination of child pornography, limitation on the activities of fortunetellers, laws on social protection, young families support, etc.

To protect Biblical family values, the group of Christian politicians under the leadership of Unguryan organized the Family Forum in the capital of Ukraine. The forum was held in October 2012 and brought together more than 150 Christian, public and scientific organizations around the issues of the protection of family values and development of a pro-family movement in Ukraine.

Thanks to its active position, Baptists in Ukraine support Christians in countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus that suffer persecution. In 2011 Unguryan joined representatives from the Baptist World Alliance® (Raimundo Barreto) and European Baptist Federation (Christer Daelander) on a human rights visit to Uzbekistan where religious freedom violations have occurred. Significant change is taking place in the government of Ukraine thanks to Christians who seek to improve Ukrainian legislation and unite Ukrainians around God, especially in matters of spirituality and morality.

Facing Page:
Pavel Unguryan holding a copy of the Bible.
Unguryan led a campaign to distribute Bibles in the Parliament of Ukraine.

Right: Pavel Unguryan and a colleague parliamentarian examine a copy of the Bible in Parliament.
The fundamental axiom of democracy is that the people are sovereign. The inescapable fact of democracy is that the sovereign people cannot govern directly. Out of necessity they must devolve their sovereign power to representatives that they elect to form the Parliament. The central conundrum of democracy is that the elected representatives of the people, in Parliament, can legally and constitutionally betray the fundamental axiom of democracy and compromise the very electoral process by which they gain access to Parliament. They can enhance their incumbency, and that of the political parties that hold the majority in Parliament, by the electoral laws enacted, the electoral machinery that is established, resources allocated to run the electoral process and the personnel appointed to direct and manage the electoral machinery. At the root of this betrayal are unfaithful stewards who use the power devolved by the people for their own ends.

The betrayal of democracy, and of compromised electoral systems by unfaithful stewards of power, litter the history of democracy and the contemporary landscape as democratic governance has spread across the world. Examples can be clearly seen in several mature democracies of the so-called first world, emerging democracies of the formerly labeled second world, the newer fledgling democracies of the so-called developing world and even in the aftermath of the recent Arab Spring.

My understanding of the nature of democracy was developed in my efforts to come to terms with the job that I was catapulted into doing as chairman of the electoral management body of Jamaica. I came to realize that my country had embarked on a unique approach to this inherent weakness in democracy. Further, that as chairman I was one of the stewards of the electoral system.

Jamaica became the first colony or dominion of the British Empire to be granted adult suffrage and a representative government. In the General Elections of December 1944 in Jamaica every adult 21 years or older was eligible to register and vote, and the majority did. Between 1944 and August 6, 1962, when Jamaica became independent, five General Elections were held on the “winner takes all” system. Two major political parties had emerged and consolidated their positions in the political arena. The “winner takes all” system continued in independent Jamaica. However, General Elections became more contentious and more violent.

The lead up to the 1980 General Elections was particularly contentious and violent. The deaths of more than 600 persons that year were attributed to partisan political motives. In a nutshell, both major political parties had used the system to their advantage, despite the fact that they alternated in government. In 1979 in the vortex of the violence that brought the country to the brink of civil war, the leadership of the two warring political parties agreed that the abusive “winner takes all” system inherited from the colonial era was not tenable in independent Jamaica. They agreed to establish a tripartite body, the Electoral Advisory Committee (EAC), a committee of the Parliament, to which the electoral machinery would be devolved. The EAC was composed of two members named by the Prime Minister, two members named by the Leader of the Opposition and three members jointly agreed on by both, one of whom would be chairman.

In the bloody General Election of 1980 the Opposition Party was elected to form the government. A snap General Election was held in December 1983. The party formerly in government did not contest the election claiming that the 1979 agreement had been breached. This created a major political crisis in the country since only one party was elected to Parliament. The Prime Minister acted upon popular opinion to appoint eight Senators who were not members
of his party who were highly regarded leaders in different sectors of the society, and who could be expected to be “guardians” of the Constitution. I was one of the eight Independent Senators that served in Parliament during the period of the One-Party House of Representatives from 1984-1989 and therefore saw at first hand the efforts made by the leadership of both major parties to honor the agreement of 1979.

In December 2000 three new Selected Members, highly respected professionals in their respective fields, were appointed to the EAC. They had in common the fact that they were practicing Christian believers who were very active in their respective denominations: Seventh Day Adventist, Methodist and Baptist, I being the latter who was appointed chairman.

The EAC Act of 1979 promised the formation of an Electoral Commission. This Commission came into being on December 1, 2006, and replaced the EAC, which was abolished. Since the formation of the EAC and the Electoral Commission, its successor, Jamaica has developed the reputation for conducting elections at the highest international standards. Among the obstacles that had to be overcome was a legacy of distrust that persisted and pervaded the relationships between the major political parties at all levels and also in the general citizenry.

The Role of Stewardship

One of the major accomplishments of independent Jamaica has been the transformation of its electoral system. Gerrymandering of constituency boundaries has been eliminated. Elections are conducted in such a manner that every Member of Parliament is elected by the plurality of secret ballots cast by eligible electors.

In reflecting on Jamaica’s long history of elections, its experience with the abusive “winner takes all” system, its decision in 1979 to change course and its experiment that has transformed the electoral process and led to political stability in the country, the following conclusions seem warranted:

- Unfaithful stewards of the power devolved to them by the people compromise democracy and sow the seeds of political instability and violence in elections. However, the situation is not beyond redemption.
- Faithful stewards of power are vital and essential; however, faithfulness alone is not sufficient.
- To be fruitful and effective, stewards need to be shrewd, a quality highlighted by Jesus and recorded in Luke 16: 1-13. This is particularly required of those who operate in the bureaucracy of the state because they work in an intersection in which political intention compete and contend. Often the intersection is jammed as cross purposes prevail. It is the responsibility of stewards to clear the jam and get things moving in directions of progress. This requires sober judgment, careful calculation and wise actions that are never truly neutral. The history of stewardship reveals two types of stewards: stewards of the palace, the powerful, and stewards of the people. The most effective stewards are those who the palace needs and the people trust, for the same reasons: their competency, honesty and integrity.

The transformation that has taken place in Jamaica cannot be regarded as permanent. Loopholes that favor incumbency could be re-introduced into electoral laws. This is the perennial paradox of democracy. Commitment to democratic principles must be exercised independently by each generation of Parliamentarians and each Electoral Commission.

Errol Miller, a longtime Baptist and University Professor, was an Independent Senator in Jamaica, 1984-1989; and chaired the Electoral Advisory Committee and its successor the Electoral Commission over the period 2000-2012. The full version of this article may be read on the BWA website at www.bwanet.org.
A major step was taken in the advent of educational opportunities for the masses and public awareness of the size and significance of Baptists with the establishment of The Bahamas Baptist Missionary & Educational Convention in 1935. Early strong proponents of Majority Rule included Baptist leaders like the late H.W. Brown, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church (the oldest continuing congregation in the Caribbean), the late Enoch Backford, the late R.E. Cooper and the late A.S. Colebrooke, all former presidents of The Bahamas National Baptist Missionary of Educational Convention.

Brown and Colebrooke threw their weight behind the young dynamic political leader, Lynden Oscar Pindling and other leaders who were fighting for Majority Rule in a country in which 90 percent of the population was black, but was nevertheless disfranchised socially, economically and educationally. Their voices were largely heard through sermons, speeches during mass rallies and whenever given the opportunity to address audiences, invited or otherwise.

In an effort to wrest power from the hands of the privileged 10 percent white oligarchy, several conclaves were held with the authorities in England resulting in amendments to the constitution, disruption of the proceedings of parliament on historic Black Tuesday when, during a sitting of parliament, Member of Parliament Lynden Oscar Pindling took the mace (symbol of the power of the speaker) and threw it out of the window of the Honorable House of Assembly. Member of Parliament Milo Butler followed suit by tossing the hour glass out of the window.

The turning point came in 1967. In a nonviolent electoral process, the Progressive Liberal Party with Lynden Oscar Pindling as leader won the majority of seats and with the alliance of the only Labor Party elected member, Randol Fawkes, the party formed the new government of the Bahamas, having lost in 1962 due to unfair electoral boundaries. It was an election colored with boycotts, media propaganda and disclosures of corruption and conflicts of interest.

H.W. Brown, because of his prominence in the struggle was included in the high level delegation that went to London to hammer out the constitution for an independent Bahamas. R.E. Cooper, as president of The Bahamas Christian Council, preached the official Independence Day Sermon. There were many other pastors and congregants in various parts of the Bahamas who can rightly be called “drum majors” in the political process.
Emergency Response Fund

The Emergency Response Fund enables a Baptist response to be made to emergency situations where unusual circumstances disrupt or destroy community life – famine, earthquakes, hurricanes, cyclones, tornadoes, fire, floods, volcanic eruptions, civil strife or war. Since BWA members now have a presence in more than 120 different countries, we have personnel in many areas where disasters occur. It is the local Baptist communities who are on the scene and ministering to their neighbors in times of crisis. They know the situations and the needs. When BWAid receives a request to assist from a member body, it is the Emergency Response Fund that allows us to make an initial response to the crisis.

BWAid has been assisting member bodies in how to respond in times of emergency as well as helping fund their responses.

2012 brought hardship to many thousands of people affected by disasters. BWAid, through the Emergency Response Fund, assisted with earthquake recovery in Japan, Haiti and Myanmar; hurricane relief in Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Sierra Leone and the US; flood relief in Mozambique, Nigeria, India and Croatia; hunger emergency assistance in the Horn of Africa; assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons in Thailand, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India and the Middle East; and ethnic clashes in India.

Funding for Development

Projects relating to development are the best way to lift people out of the cycle of poverty and hopelessness. To give people the ability to improve their lives as well as that of their family is a benefit to the community as a whole. When you support projects of education and livelihood training you are giving skills that will help bring people out of poverty and hunger. By supplying the simple tools and knowledge to plant crops, you are feeding them for a lifetime.

Baptist conventions and unions worldwide are following the call of Jesus to love your neighbor, to feed those who are hungry and to minister to those in need. BWAid helps them with resources to implement their carefully planned projects.

Gifts for development allow member bodies to develop projects aimed at eradicating extreme hunger and poverty in their communities. Projects that have inclusive participation of the community, that is, inclusion of women and youth participation from its inception, implementation, governance and evaluation, are given priority. Special consideration is also given to applicants who have sustainable community development in mind, as entire areas can be transformed when funding is applied strategically.
Hunger assistance

Hunger assistance continues to be one of the greatest problems facing our world today. Hunger stems from many causes. Natural disasters and human-made catastrophes have a devastating effect on food production. Poor people in the developing world spend up to 80 percent of their income to buy food, usually basics such as wheat, rice or corn.

Government policies make people hungry. Governments in both the developed and developing parts of the world exercise negative policies that can have extreme impact on the food chain. A price reduction on a commodity in the developed world often means that the producer in a developing country suffers a loss in income. In the developing world, unfair distribution systems can often cause food shortages.

BWAid not only feeds the hungry, but looks at these chains of causes and seeks to alleviate these causes. At times, hunger funds are needed to purchase or ship food to those who are hungry. At other times, we provide the resources for people to grow their own food.

In the United States, funds can be designated to BWAid from CROP Hunger Walk activities.

Medical

BWAid often receives requests for urgent assistance with medical needs. Sometimes the need might be for basic medical equipment, supplies or drugs. At other times the request is to assist with a particular situation that has occurred, such as an outbreak of cholera. BWAid needs to be able to offer an immediate response to many situations.

Through the Gifts-in-Kind program, BWAid, working with its overseas partners, is able to send shipments of requested medical equipment and medicines that have been donated. Because the contents are donated, BWAid is able to cover the cost of shipping. In 2012 a shipment of food, water purification, metal roofing panels, and medicine/personal hygiene items was sent to Eastern Cuba following Hurricane Sandy at a cost to BWAid of US$7,000.

Micah Challenge

In 2000, the nations of the world adopted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the alleviation of poverty. The eight goals are eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality rates; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

Targets were set for all of these goals, and nations have made commitments to meet these targets by 2015. We are now two years out from the target year. The Micah Challenge is a global Christian movement encouraging Christians to be committed to the poor and hold governments accountable for their pledge within the Millennium Development Goals.

The Micah Challenge works to educate, train and resource Christians to become a global voice on poverty, encouraging Christians to be informed, to engage and to speak out for justice.

In 2004, the BWA General Council approved the following statement: “CALLS UPON the nations of the world to take seriously the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations in the desire to halve current levels of poverty by 2015.”

Christians around the world have been supporting this movement. Many Baptists are involved in their own countries. Read more on the Micah Challenge at www.micahchallenge.org. This project enables BWAid to support the work of Micah Challenge.

It is important that Baptists around the world support the work and ministry of BWAid through their prayers and gifts.

Donations are accepted online via the BWA website: www.bwanet.org
Young Nepal Leader Takes on Challenge to Train Pastors

It was a dream that provided the initial spark that led Subash Pradhan to faith in Jesus Christ. One night the Nepalese dreamed he was close to death. His family surrounded him for what would be their last visit. He felt helpless. He then saw a man surrounded by bright light with a lamb bounding at his feet. The man picked up the lamb and carried it.

“I woke up not knowing what to make of the dream,” Pradhan said. Later on, a neighbor invited him to a Christian church where he found it a fun and joyful environment with young people singing and playing music. However, as he was Hindu he began looking for idols that he thought they would be worshipping. He saw none, but what he saw was a wall painting that looked like the man in his dream, also carrying a lamb. That made a deep impression on him. Pradhan continued to visit the church and upon hearing the story of Christ's resurrection, dedicated his life to Christ at the age of 16. “I wanted to serve a living God,” he said. “That was important to me.”

Nearly two decades later, Pradhan was selected as principal of Nepal Baptist Bible College (NBBC) in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, after serving as a secondary school teacher and then going to do theological training in Malaysia.

It was a long bout of laryngitis that led him into full time ministry as a theological teacher and principal. Doctors were not much help. He tried home remedies, gargling salt water between teaching sessions. Yet there was no long term relief. He remembered saying, “Lord, if you heal me I will quit and give everything to you.”

His throat appeared to have improved. He, however, did not fulfill his promise to God out of fear of not having a livelihood. Pradhan had a relatively new family with young twins, was the only breadwinner, and was the sole support for his mother. “I didn’t have faith that God could provide.” His father had died when Pradhan was still quite young and as the eldest son, he had responsibility for his mother and sibling.

Nine months passed and his throat worsened. The doctor told him he needed to quit teaching in order for his voice to heal. “You’re kicking me in the stomach,” he told the doctor. Pradhan prayed to God, basically challenging God that if God wanted him to serve full time ministry, God would need to demonstrate this through the book of John. As he began reading the gospel, he felt caught by the words, “‘Lord, what good is there in following you?’ And the Lord spoke, ‘’come and see.’” He broke down and wept.

Within a matter of days he submitted his resignation and enrolled at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary. Upon returning to Nepal in 2007 he taught at NBBC part time and was named school principal in 2008.

The Nepal Baptist Church Council, with which the school is affiliated, is one of the fastest growing Baptist groups on the Asian continent. There are 132 churches comprising approximately 16,000 members after numbering 102 churches and 7,000 members in 2007. This phenomenal growth stems from a policy that each church must plant at least one new church. Pradhan explained that his church planted eight new churches and each of those eight churches has in turn founded, or will form, at least one church each.

There is great need for theological education and training in Nepal. Pradhan said. But even though the cost is less than US$700 per year per student, the school and those who seek training have limited financial resources. Many Nepalese Baptist pastors, he said, have had no formal training. Some are barely literate. To meet this need, the college offers a certificate course in satellite centers across Nepal. One hundred and thirty two pastors have so far received this certificate training. NBBC also offers a bachelor’s degree course for new pastors.

The school, though relatively young, has been affected by political instability. It opened in 1998 offering one month church leadership courses before it began offering a three-month program. The school closed in 2004 due to political tensions in Nepal. It reopened in 2005, offering leadership workshops. In 2007, the decision was made to establish a Bachelor of Theology degree. Twenty one students have already graduated from the B.Th. program.

Pradhan’s vision for NBBC goes beyond Nepal itself. “There are 80,000 Nepalese in South Korea and 15,000 in the state of Maryland in the United States,” he said. Large groups of Nepalese live in other countries, with some 400,000 in Malaysia, 19,000 in Australia, and more than 10,000 in Japan.

There are opportunities for further growth inside Nepal itself. Nepal was a Hindu kingdom until 2008. Up until then, Christianity was largely an underground religion because it was against the law to proselytize. “In the late 1990s, we shifted to a multi-party system where you could be a Christian but it was against the law to try and convert a Hindu. In 2008, Nepal shifted to a secular state.” Official persecution has largely ended, and churches now operate openly.

His vision is to train Nepalese pastors who can serve Nepalese in Nepal and the Diaspora. The aim, he said, is to train pastors who will have an impact on the church, their community, the nation, and beyond.

Right: Subash Pradhan, principal of the Nepal Baptist Bible College, at the BWA international offices with BWA General Secretary Neville Callam
On April 30, 2013, the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reviewed the Republic of Azerbaijan as part of the UPR second cycle. The first cycle of the review process took place in 2009. The second cycle of the review in April focused on implementation of the accepted recommendations from the first review in 2009 and subsequent developments of the human rights situation in the country since. This document highlights cases that the Baptist World Alliance® and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) have documented between January 2009 and March 2013 and submitted as part of the UPR process.

In January 2009 a BWA/EBF delegation visited Azerbaijan. The investigations led by this international team, before and during this visit, concluded that serious instances of intolerance and discrimination toward Baptist Christians and churches continue to take place in Azerbaijan. Over the past four years, other reports from Baptist and other religious leaders in the country have reinforced those findings.

**Religious Freedom-Related Recommendations in the First Review**

Among the recommendations made in 2009, was the need for Azerbaijan to address its shortcomings in human rights promotion and protection, including the rule of law and adequate protection of vulnerable segments of the population; take fully into account the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion aimed at promoting and fully ensuring freedom of religion for all religious communities throughout Azerbaijan; put in place further measures to ensure respect for freedom of expression and of the media; and to establish a more streamlined and transparent registration process and visa issuing for clergy and religious personnel in general.

**Areas of Continued Concern**

Violations of freedom of conscience and belief by the state continue on a systematic basis. According to a Religion Law enacted in 1992 and amended in 2010, no religious activity is allowed without registration, but the requirements for a religious group to register delay the registration process and often take years, if ever concluded.

Only registered religious centers can establish religious publishing houses and all literature they produce must be subjected to censorship. The State Committee also insists that the number of copies of each work imported or printed locally must be approved. A special Expertise Department of the State Committee oversees this censorship.

Courses for the study of holy books take place under the control of the committee. The committee should be notified of these courses in advance. In the notification there must be a list with names of those taking part in the courses (which must be citizens of Azerbaijan), copies of their identification cards, a list of teachers (which must be only citizens of Azerbaijan), and the program of these courses.

Religious communities have the right to use buildings and properties accepted by the state. The State Committee must approve any new place of worship or rebuilding of any place of worship. The New Administrative Code has separately introduced punishments for breaking these rules. In practice, it is very difficult for religious minorities to get permission for places of worship. The “Cathedral of Praise” is an example of a registered Charismatic Church whose building was confiscated.

New articles limiting religious freedom have been introduced. Members of a religious community not registered pay a fine of 1,500 manat. Officials pay a fine of between 7,000 and 8,000 manat.

**The Status of Religious Freedom in Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan prides itself on being a secular state and a tolerant society where its citizens enjoy freedom of conscience and belief, according to the Azerbaijan constitution. However, religious minorities of all kinds have experienced discrimination and harassment.

The parliament passed a new law requiring all religious entities that had previously received registration to re-register with the State Committee. The deadline for re-registration was set for January 2010. Unfortunately, the process of re-registration created difficulties, especially for Protestant Christians. Only a small Pentecostal church got its registration renewed. Most, including some established groups that previously had registration for a number of years, were denied re-registration. The Baptist union tried to get registration approximately 10 years ago without success, and several local Baptist churches have tried for decades without success. The First Baptist Church of Baku has a registration under the old Religion Law and claims it to be valid as it has not been annulled by a court.

Registration is compulsory in order to meet legally for prayer, worship, teaching and celebration. Religious groups are only permitted to have meetings within a registered church building, which means house churches and meeting in homes or other venues are unlawful. Theological or Bible schools must get permission from the state, the number of lessons per week is limited and the maximum time allowed for these courses is two years.

These amendments of the Religion Law contradict the constitution. In practice threats and harassments toward religious minorities were frequent prior to the amendments of the Religion Law and the Criminal and Administrative Code, but the legal basis for these actions has been strengthened. These are problems faced not only by Baptist Christians, but by other minority religious groups such as Jehovah’s Witness, Baha’is, Muslim groups that do not accept the leaders appointed by the Caucasian Muslim Board, and other religious organizations.

**The Situation of Baptists**

Several Baptist leaders have described in detail instances of harassment and intimidation from the police and public media. These have included hostile interrogation, threats against themselves and their families, and even imprisonment.

The cases of two pastors imprisoned in Aliabad have become well known internationally. It is widely considered that Zaur Balayev and Hamid Shabanov were convicted on false charges and were targeted because they are Baptist pastors of unregistered churches. The BWA received a report stating that
Zaur Balayev, a Baptist pastor and Hinayat Shabanova, the wife of another Baptist pastor, who were arrested for operating unregistered churches in Azerbaijan, had their fines reversed. Both were fined the equivalent of US$2,000, which is roughly four months to one year worth of wages in the Caucasus country and former Soviet republic.

The fines were imposed after raids on the Balayev and Shabanov family homes in the village of Aliabad in the northwestern part of the country in November 2012. They were found guilty on March 29 this year for violating the Code of Administrative Offences that punishes “clergy and religious associations holding special religious meetings for children and young people, as well as the holding by religious bodies of literature circles or other specialized groups.”

This is not the first time that both families were prosecuted. Balayev was arrested in May 2007 and was sentenced in August 2008 to two years in prison for violence against a state representative when carrying out official duties. It was widely believed that these were trumped up charges. Balayev was released from prison after representation was made by the Baptist World Alliance® and former United States President Jimmy Carter.

Baptist pastor Hamid Shabanov, husband of Shabanova, was arrested in June 2008 after an illegal weapon was allegedly found in his home. It is alleged that the pistol was planted and he was framed. He was later sentenced to two years in a labor camp but was released for time served in jail and under house arrest.

The legal procedures followed in the case of Shabanov were not acceptable. On March 29 this year we received reports that these two congregations and their pastors had been tried and fined once again.

Serious obstacles are placed in the way of Baptist churches seeking official registration as religious communities. The Aliabad Baptist Church led by Balayev has been attempting to register itself for 15 years. The local state official repeatedly refused to notarize the 10 signatures required for the Founding Document, thus making it impossible for the application to proceed.

The Neftechala Baptist Church needs an additional document to complete its registration: the building passport for the facilities it has used since 1966. This document was submitted with a set of papers and was not returned to the church. Now the church has letters stating that nobody, nationally or locally, will issue a new Building Passport so that the registration process can be completed. In December 2011 the Neftechala Baptist Church was raided and closed by the police and the pastor was fined.

The BWA has documented several cases of Baptists being asked to leave their employment when it is known that they are Baptist Christians. One example is the case of the former general secretary of the Baptist union, Elnur Jabiyev, who was forced to leave his employment as a Baku police officer in 2001.

From BWA visits with other faith groups, especially the Muslims and the Orthodox Church, it was learned that despite Azerbaijan having no Law of Restitution, many buildings confiscated by the Soviet authorities have been returned to their original owners. In 1931 a church building (constructed by the Baptists in 1911) at Azadliq Avenue 47 in Baku, was confiscated, and this building is used today as a cinema-theater. The Baptists regard this as a desecration of one of their holy places and have submitted documents requesting its return from as far back as 1989.

These are edited excerpts of a report submitted by the BWA to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Azerbaijan in April of this year.
For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

— Leviticus 10:17-18

Defending the Cause
OF REFUGEES & ORPHANS

For many of us these words may seem like distant instructions to far off people. The plight of widows and orphans may weigh heavy on our hearts, but what does it really look like to love the foreigner residing among us? Perhaps we think of this as a social question or a political concern, and yet this is God’s Word, given to us as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. This is not a suggestion or a nice idea. These verses describe how believers are supposed to live and act.

But what if the foreigner residing among you was an enemy? What if your people had suffered as they had burned your houses, stolen your harvests, and occupied your land for more than 30 years? How would you respond when someone who might have once taken your life, now comes to you for help?

That’s the very real and present dilemma faced by Pastor Jihad Haddad of Zahlé Baptist Church in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley. With a congregation of about 50 people, Zahlé Baptist has seen their community change before their very eyes as countless Syrian refugees have flooded into their land. These are families; father and mothers, sons and daughters, widows and orphans who have fled the war and violence of Syria in search of shelter and safety. But these are also old enemies. These are Syrians. These are the people who invaded and occupied Lebanon during its long civil war. The natural human response is to feel that finally justice has been served. Those who once brought death and destruction are at long last reaping what they have sown.

But something strange is happening in the hearts and lives of Zahlé Baptist Church. Instead of longing for revenge, God has filled their hearts with compassion. They have reached across the old lines of animosity and are providing food and assistance to those displaced by war. These 50 believers are now serving more than 500 hundred families. Through such acts of mercy, Syrian refugees are learning about the love of Christ and are discovering that God is not distant, but is present and deeply concerned for them. The gospel is being proclaimed in word and deed and the Holy Spirit is bringing many to faith!

Zahlé Baptist Church has seen God multiply their efforts far beyond what they could have imagined. And this is just one story of one small church. The need in Lebanon and Syria is great and God is rising up faithful men and women to meet the challenge.

Excerpted from a report from Middle East Bible Outreach, a ministry of the Lebanese Baptist Society.

Through such acts of mercy, Syrian refugees are learning about the love of Christ and are discovering that God is . . . present.
A small group of ABTS students and staff went up to Zahle, the Bekaa, on Saturday April 13, 2013 to implement a one day fun program for Syrian refugee children. The children and their families live mostly in tents, and in poverty. The sun was strong. This ministry is a collaboration between ABTS, Heart for Lebanon and the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development, organized at least one Saturday per month.

The program prepared by the ABTS team included drawing and painting, learning a song with gestures, fun games, and a story read to the children. Biscuits and juice were distributed. More than 70 children were present this time, a significant increase compared to the previous visit one month ago.

At the end, the ABTS team cleaned, along with the children, the location of the activity.

... a one day fun program for Syrian refugee children.

Syrian refugees receiving assistance from Baptists in Lebanon
(Photos courtesy of ABTS)
It was much unexpected turmoil. Not even in our wildest dreams did we imagine the violence that is sweeping across the country now. For many years Syria enjoyed peace and stability in the heart of the unstable Middle East. We were a safe haven for our neighbors. We received displaced people and refugees from other countries like Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, and even from Somalia and other far away areas.

Yet now the violence pushed the host people out of their homes, fleeing for their lives. Many are displaced internally and many others are external refugees living in the most humiliating circumstances, deprived of even shelter, clean water, power, food, and medical care. Millions are not sleeping in their own beds, forced out of their homes to find themselves with their children homeless and living in public parks or in the wilderness. Others are not sure if they or their children and loved ones will see the light of a new day, tens of thousands of families lost loved ones: a child, a father, a mother, or a husband. Hundreds of the injured died for lack of medical care.

Thousands of children go to bed terrified of the sound of shelling. Hundreds of thousands are in camps in neighboring countries. My people are hurting. I can cry like Nehemiah because the walls of our cities are burnt and the people in great trouble and disgrace, I can weep like Jeremiah because of the intensity and the spread of evil, I can mourn like David because of the indiscriminate brutal killing of innocent people, children, women, elderly, youth subject to shelling or under the rubble of their homes.

Neither fighting party is the true mother of this child, this country. Their worship of the idol of power and their desire to win is too cruel to care for the child they claim that they are fighting for. Innocent people are paying the heavy toll of this evil. It is gloomy, sad and painful.

The only good news is that the church is moving whole-heartedly to help relieve some of the suffering, and the Lord is surely opening hearts to receive the gospel.

Excerpted from the article We mustn’t give up on Christians in Syria on the God and Politics UK website.
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Scott Thumma of Hartford Institute for Religion Research and Dave Travis of Leadership Network conducted a study of more than 1,000 churches. Among their findings was an innovative way of grouping those who attend churches into five categories. The research team also shared some observations about how churches relate to these groups of attendees that are worthy of consideration.

The names of the five groups are not that unusual. They are: the core; the committed; moderate members; marginal persons; and infrequent attenders, visitors and spectators. But when the authors begin to describe each group, one may see the differences between them and begin to ask, “What kind of church member am I?”

The core group is the “leadership elite” of the church. These are church attendees with the greatest involvement in the life of the church and the greatest sense of loyalty to the church. Loyalty to the church is usually seen to be an expression of a deep commitment to living a Christian life. Core members are those persons who lead the church’s ministries and missions groups. They contribute well over 10 percent of their income to the church and other charities. Many spend 40 hours or more each week in church-related activities. The church is intertwined in the daily life patterns of core members.

The core group usually includes staff members, ministry leaders, some extended family members and others with a profound loyalty to the church. Thumma and Davis say that about five per cent of those present on any given Sunday morning fall into the core group category.

The committed group also reflects high involvement in church life. Members of this group may attend several functions each week at the church. They volunteer to serve in church ministries. They tithe. They participate in small groups. They are concerned Together, the core group and the committed group illustrate the oft-repeated truism that “20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work” in any church.

(Continued on next page)
about their Christian walk with the Lord. Even most of their close friends come from the church. About 15 per cent of attendees fall into this group.

Together, the core group and the committed group illustrate the oft-repeated truism that “20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work” in any church.

Moderate members would be considered desirable members by most congregations. They are active and supportive but less so than they might be. Moderate members attend regularly. Occasionally they volunteer for leadership roles but most of the time they prefer to participate without responsibilities. They contribute financially but less than a tithe of their income, usually between five and 10 per cent. Some of their best friends are from church.

Moderate members make up about 40 percent of those present at worship on any given Sunday.

The marginal persons category is the largest group related to the church numerically. But the attendance patterns for members of this group keep them from being the largest group attending worship on a given Sunday. Marginal persons attend church once or twice a month. Still, they make up 30 per cent of a typical congregation, the researchers found.

Marginal persons are seldom involved in church ministries. They contribute little financially and, interestingly, almost always give cash. They may know people at church but have few good friends there. This group does little to support the church but they freely partake of the benefits provided by the church.

The final 10 per cent of a given congregation is composed of infrequent attenders. Lumped into this group are those who show up a few times a year, tourists and visitors. Thumma and Davis point out that it is important to remember that some in this group are moving away from the church for whatever reason while some are making the first steps toward eventually becoming solid participants in the church.

Obviously, these descriptions indicate that people with a wide range of commitment to Christ and to the church are present on any given Sunday.

Unfortunately pastors seem to preach to only one group. Thumma and Davis said most pastors either speak primarily to the unbelievers whom they hope are present or they speak to the core group. One approach results in a series of calls for first-time commitments to Christ, the other in a “club of the saved” with the language best suited for longtime believers.

In some places a new approach is emerging. Some churches are beginning to recognize that the infrequent attenders and the marginal persons group provide an internal missions field that can result in moving members from spectators to participants and from nominal commitment to Christ to a devoted lifestyle.

Instead of condemning members of these groups as “freeloaders,” some churches are aiming their ministries, fellowship building activities and even sermons directly at them. Already, members of these groups have openness to the gospel evidenced by their occasional participation.

This approach is, in part, recognition that Jesus commanded His followers to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). Discipleship begins with a commitment to Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. But that is the starting point, not the finish line. A growing number of churches intentionally try to move attendees along the commitment scale from infrequent attendee to committed member or even into the core category.

Christian believers can increase their commitment to Christ and to the church as they grow in their understanding of the Christian life but this seldom happens in isolation. It takes the intentional encouragement, support and guidance of a church as well as the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life.

For a church, the question becomes whether to recognize the mission field already inside the influence of the congregation and respond with a program to help people become Christian disciples, or to concentrate primarily on one aspect of the Christian message.

For the individual the first question may be, “What kind of member am I today?” However, a more important question is, “What kind of member do I want to be tomorrow?”
When Pope Benedict XVI, age 85, announced that he would resign or retire from the papacy on February 28 of this year, he broke a six-century pattern. No pope had resigned since Gregory XII in 1415 as a means of terminating the great Papal Schism, during which either two or three claimed concurrently to be pope. Benedict cited advanced age and infirmity as the reason. He had received a pacemaker before becoming pope and had recently been advised against trans-oceanic travel. He had closely observed the deteriorating health of Pope John Paul II before the end of his papacy. The media however, offered other reasons for the retirement: the clerical sexual abuse scandal, problems in the Vatican administration, the secularization of Europe, and the growth of Evangelical, especially Pentecostal, Protestantism in Latin America.

Named “Emeritus Pope,” Benedict lived briefly at Castel Gondolfo until his apartment, a refurbished monastery, was ready at the Vatican. He affirmed that he was to be “hidden to the world” and would devote himself to a life of prayer.

Students of Benedict’s tenure continue to assess his life and papacy. Receiving major attention will be his role as champion of Catholic orthodoxy both in leading the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under John Paul II and during his own pontificate. Under review will likely be his efforts to curb the effects of Vatican Council II by promoting the Latin mass and by lifting the excommunication of four bishops who had opposed the Vatican II reforms. His handling of the clerical sexual abuse scandal is already getting mixed evaluation: positive for meeting with families of victims and appointing a sex crimes prosecutor at the end of his papacy, but negative for failing to set out and enforce guidelines. The growth of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa and Asia under Benedict will deserve attention, as will the charge that Benedict was more interested in purifying the church than enlarging it. Appraisal of the German pope cannot fail to include his work as a writing theologian, who issued only three encyclicals but wrote 65 books, including his three-volume Jesus of Nazareth.

Benedict’s pattern of papal retirement may have long term effects on other popes.

When the 115 cardinals entered the conclave to elect a new pope, with 77 votes needed for the two-thirds majority, there was no clear favorite or obvious dark horse. John Paul II had been the first non-Italian pope since the Dutchman, Adrian VI, in the sixteenth century. Benedict had been the first German pope for nearly 1,000 years. Italians wanted the papal office to return to Italy, and North Americans, Africans, and Latin Americans were talking about cardinals from their regions.

On March 13 the cardinals selected Jorge Mario Bergoglio, 76, cardinal (since 2001) and archbishop (since 1998) of Buenos Aires and a Jesuit, who had been runner-up to Benedict at the conclave in 2005. Although of Italian parentage, he is the first non-European pope for more than 1,200 years and allegedly the 266th pope. Bergoglio, who took the name Francis, is the first Jesuit pope, the first pope from the Americas, and the first from the Global South. Likewise, he was the first pope to take the name Francis, primarily because of Francis of Assisi (1131-1226), who abandoned wealth to work among the poor, and secondarily in reference to Francis Xavier (1506-1552), Jesuit missionary to Asia.

In Argentina, Francis had demonstrated a simple lifestyle—living in an apartment rather than the archiepiscopal mansion, riding public transportation, and cooking his own meals. As a Jesuit he had vowed not to seek higher ecclesiastical office. He had opposed Argentina’s female president as she succeeded in getting parliamentary approval of same-sex marriage. As Pope, he has decided to live in the Vatican hotel rather than the Apostolic Palace and to eat his meals in a common dining room. After one month Francis announced the appointment of eight cardinals, from seven nations and Vatican City, to advise him in governing the church and reforming the Vatican. This was instantly hailed as a move away from the recentralization under John Paul II and Benedict toward the intent of Vatican Council II.

The papal change seems to involve personality and lifestyle. Benedict was cerebral; Francis is relational. Benedict was an introvert; Francis is an extravert. Francis seems to be a blend of his Jesuit and his adopted Franciscan spiritualties ready to throw off some of the trappings of authority. He rejected liberation theology with its debt to Marxism but has boldly championed social and economic justice.

Will the papacy of Francis be marked by continuity or change? There is no likelihood of any shift from the Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy that the Roman Church shares with all orthodox Christians. There is little likelihood under Francis of the complete removal of the major differences between Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics: Mariology and Marian piety, the Petrine office, and sacramental salvation. The right-to-life stances will surely continue unless the position on contraception is modified. It is uncertain whether under Francis the issues of mandatory clerical celibacy and possible women in the priesthood will be opened for consideration.

Perhaps Baptists throughout the world will find their greatest degree of common ground with the church of Pope Francis on issues of persecution, religious liberty, and resistance to the demands or the indifference of totalitarian or would-be totalitarian governments—a striking contrast to the pre-Vatican Council II era.

Individuals need to approach this new era with prayerful anticipation that the Argentine Jesuit may be, as Catholic author George Weigel has said, an “Evangelical Catholic,” through whom the proclamation and embodiment of the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ may be truly extended to all peoples of the earth to the glory of the triune God.

James Leo Garrett, Jr. is professor of theology, emeritus, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas in the United States and has held membership in several commissions of the BWA.
Pastors Welcome Document that Guides Relationships Between Baptists

Several pastors in the Washington Metropolitan Area welcomed a document laying out principles and guidelines for relationships between Baptists.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam introduced the document at a reception for pastors from Virginia, Maryland and Washington, DC, at the BWA international offices on April 25. He said that though it was created specifically to guide relationships within BWA organized life it could prove useful in other contexts. This view was affirmed by participants at the meeting, stating that the document could be modified so that it could be used by local churches while, at the same time, taking care not to water it down.

It was also proposed that the guidelines and principles form the basis of a Bible Study to be used by churches. One pastor indicated that his church just considered the problem of divisiveness within church life and felt that this document could form the basis for discussions on the matter. Two pastors representing two separate churches informed the meeting that they were contemplating merging into one congregation. They indicated that the document could serve as the starting point on which to forge congregational unity and that it would be an important resource in the drafting of a vision statement.

The view was that the document was long overdue and that it reflects a collaborative and servant leadership model that is worthy of emulation and adoption.

The document, Principles and Guidelines for Intra-Baptist Relationships, was unanimously endorsed by the BWA Executive Committee in March. It is to be presented to the BWA General Council for ratification at its meeting in Jamaica in July.

New UN Representative Appointed

Darrell Armstrong, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey, in the United States, is the new Baptist World Alliance® representative to the United Nations in New York City.

Since 1974, the BWA has held special consultative status with the UN through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Conference of Nongovernmental Organizations (CoNGO), which gives the organization opportunity to have a voice in different areas within the UN systems. The BWA has membership on three CoNGO committees, the Committee on Freedom of Religion and Belief, the Committee on Sustainable Development and the Committee on Human Rights.

The international Baptist organization also holds representation on the UN Human Rights Council and plays an active role on the Committee on Religious NGOs at the United Nations. The BWA holds 25 seats at the UN. BWA representatives are appointed to a two-year term, with the option to be extended. Other UN representatives are Christer Daelander and Joseph Oniyama who represent the BWA in Geneva, Switzerland, and New York, respectively.

Armstrong began his role at the recent “ECOSOC Integration Meeting on Sustainable Development” held at the New York Office of the UN. By attending this event, he was able to begin networking with other representatives, a vital component in enabling the BWA to maintain its presence. Armstrong remarked that “this ‘Special Meeting’ was certainly congruent with the theology and praxis of the Baptist World Alliance and must command our full attention and participation.”

His other representative responsibilities include advocacy on behalf of the BWA, monitoring UN actions and making reports to the BWA so that it stays informed on actions and issues that will affect the global Baptist family.

Armstrong earned degrees from Stanford University in the state of California, Princeton Theological Seminary in the state of New Jersey and the College of New Jersey. He currently serves on Princeton seminary’s Board of Trustees.
A number of Baptist groups in the United States have offered assistance to persons and communities affected by tornadoes in the state of Oklahoma in that country.

On the afternoon of May 20, a tornado with peak winds estimated at 210 miles per hour (340 km/h), struck Moore, Oklahoma, and adjacent areas, killing more than 20 persons and injuring 377 others. More than 140 patients, including at least 70 children, were treated at hospitals. Damage was estimated at between US$1.5 billion and US$2 billion.

The tornado was part of a larger weather system that had produced several other tornadoes over the previous two days in Moore and other towns such as Shawnee. Other tornadoes affected Oklahoma and other states in the US between May 26 and 31, causing further damage.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), Texas Baptist Men (TBM), North Carolina Baptist Men (NCBM), the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, American Baptist Churches USA and other Baptist groups have sent personnel and supplies and offered prayerful support to the town of Moore and other communities.

Assistance offered included the removal of debris, provision of food and water and emotional and spiritual support for families and responders. “Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has established a centralized plan to assist area CBF churches and partners respond in the Moore and Shawnee areas,” said Tommy Deal, US Disaster Response Coordinator for the CBF.

NCBM indicated that they had 50 volunteers available to go to the disaster area. TBM did some work in the Shawnee area and was working toward offering long term recovery help.

Employees at Baylor Health Care System (BHCS), a Baptist-affiliated institution in the state of Texas, donated hygiene kits in areas where fewer resources were available, according to Don Sewell, director of Faith in Action Initiatives with BHCS.

Assistance by Baptists is expected to be extended throughout the summer months as groups stagger the sending of teams into the area.

“Pray for the people impacted by the disaster as they go through various stages of grief and then seek to come out the other end as stronger people,” said George Bullard, Baptist World Alliance® regional secretary for North America and general secretary for the North American Baptist Fellowship, which is helping to coordinate the Baptist response through its Disaster Response Network.

“Pray for the first responders who go in when the situation may still be dangerous. Pray for the people with authority and power that they will make wise decisions about the deployment of resources. Pray for people who want to help that they will discover ways to help that actually benefit,” Bullard urged.

An explosion at the West Fertilizer Plant on April 17 leveled several blocks of the town and caused fires to spread across several more blocks. The explosion was measured by the US Geological Survey as a magnitude 2.1 earthquake.

Everyone within one mile (1.6 km) of the fertilizer plant was evacuated while firefighters from multiple communities brought the fires under control. There were at least 15 fatalities, including five firefighters. Approximately 200 people injured.

Among the homes destroyed was that of the pastor of First Baptist Church. The church buildings also sustained damage.

“As trite as this may sound, the greatest and most meaningful way anyone can help us is to pray and don’t stop praying for a long time,” read a statement from First Baptist. “Although this tragedy is a terrible experience and has been absolutely horrific, we have a peace that doesn’t make sense and our strength is renewed day by day. Those blessings are the only things keeping us going, and those blessings come a result of the prayers of people all over the world who are interceding for us. We sincerely covet your prayers and we appreciate them more than can begin to understand.”

A team of Texas Baptists’ staff members, including Executive Director David Hardage and Texas Baptists’ Disaster Recovery (Continued on next page)
European Baptist Women Meet in Germany

The European Baptist Women’s Union (EBWU) met for its once in every five years election conference in Hanover, Germany, from May 30–June 2. The theme of the conference was *Stand up and live!* Approximately 148 women from 34 European countries and two other countries from outside the continent attended the event.

Raquel Contreras, president of the BWA Women’s Department, led three Bible studies over two days. The studies were based on 1 Samuel chapter 1. There were six workshops.

On May 31 the 34 country representatives shared what is happening in their countries and how women and families are being affected. It was a moving experience as they spoke about war, abuse, refugees, trafficking of women and children, among other issues. What stood out was that through all the hardships, it was their faith in God that sustained and helped them to minister to those in need. The session ended with Patsy Davis, executive director of the BWA Women’s Department, sharing about the situation of Baptist women around the world and how these women are dealing with life in a changing world.

On the morning of June 1 a new EBWU Executive Committee was elected. Those voted into office for the period 2013-2018 included President Aniko Ujvari of Hungary; Vice President Wies Dijkstra of the Netherlands; Secretary Margaret Brown from Scotland; and Treasurer Fabienne Seguin from France.

The new officers were installed into office on Sunday, June 2, where Regina Class, outgoing general secretary of the German Baptist Union, was the preacher. Tony Peck, European Baptist Federation general secretary and BWA Women’s Department President Contreras led in the dedication of the new officers and presided at the Lord’s Supper.

Right: The destruction following the explosion in West, Texas

(Photo courtesy of Mike Stone)

Below: First Baptist Church in West, Texas

Director Chris Liebrum, headed to West on April 18 to assist the pastor and offer support for his congregation.

Through the connection made by Texas Baptists, Texas Baptist Men were dispatched to West on April 18 as well. Latham Springs Camp and Retreat Center was opened to house people affected by the explosion.

There were an abundance of distribution items provided to respond to the victims of the explosion in West, Texas.
**BWA Sends Aid to Refugee Fire Victims**

The Baptist World Alliance® (BWA) sent an initial sum of US$20,000 to assist Karenni refugees whose homes were badly damaged or destroyed in a fire in a refugee camp in Thailand, killing 37 persons.

The Karenni are a subgroup of the Karen people living mostly in Kayah State (formerly Karenni State) of Myanmar. Many of the refugees fled conflict zones in Kayah and Karen states.

The fire, which occurred on March 22 in the Ban Mae Surin camp in Mae Hong Son province of northern Thailand, was extinguished about two hours after it began. Approximately 200 people were wounded and hospitalized. At least 2,300 persons were left homeless.

“Our prayers are with the people who have lost families and loved ones and we ask the Baptist family to continue to support them in their prayers,” said Baptist World Aid Director Rothangliani Chhangte. “Some children have been left orphaned and there is need for our continued prayers and support for the people.”

Blooming Night Zion of the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO) told the BWA that among the facilities destroyed and damaged were a church, a clinic, a hospital, two schools, two food warehouses, KWO offices, and many houses.

Mae Surin camp is one of 10 refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border, housing a total of about 130,000 refugees.

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**Refugee School Destroyed by Fire Holds Graduation Ceremony**

A graduation ceremony of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBSC) in the Mae La Refugee Camp in Thailand, which was destroyed by fire one year ago, was held recently.

The school was gutted on April 28, 2012, but was partially rebuilt in time for the start of the new school year in July. The Baptist World Alliance® (BWA) donated half the funds toward the rebuilding of the school.

“The building is completed, the students also completed their school and yesterday we celebrated the dedication of the building to God,” Saw Simon, founder and principal of the school, wrote on April 15. “I would like to say thank you very much to all of you [for] your visits, your letters, your email, your encouragement, your donations and your prayers.”

KKBBSC offers general education to refugees and training to church leaders. Simon, the recipient of the 2000 BWA (Continued on next page)
Refugee School Graduation continued

Human Rights Award, said 58 students graduated. The school, he said, had an enrollment of 420 students for the 2012-2013 school year. Approximately 3,000 persons, most of whom are affiliated with the Kaw Thoo Lei Karen Baptist Churches, a group of Baptist churches founded in the refugee camps, attended the graduation and dedication ceremony.

Donations to the Uganda flood relief effort may be made online at the BWA website.

Floods Ravage Western Uganda, BWA Sends Aid

The Baptist World Alliance® (BWA) sent an initial sum of US$5,000 to assist victims flooded out in the East African country of Uganda. At least six people have been killed while others remain missing.

A number of Baptist churches in the affected regions are sheltering persons displaced by the disaster, including one that houses more than 360 persons.

On May 1 and 5 heavy rains fell in Kasese District in western Uganda causing flash floods that led to loss of life and destruction of property. Almost 4,000 houses in 57 villages were affected, displacing more than 25,000.

Four rivers, Nyamwamba, Mubuku, Bulemba and Kitakena burst their banks and destroyed surrounding homes, hospitals, gardens, roads and bridges.

Kenneth Wafula, general secretary of the Uganda Baptist Convention, told the BWA on May 6 that the “River Nyamwamba has burst its banks for the second time since last week, and has so far claimed many lives and displaced thousands of others.” Baptist teams on the ground, he said, are “worried that the disaster may worsen if the river continues to flood.”

Many residents heeded warnings to vacate the area but those who opted to stay were affected by the floods that sealed off a number of roads and submerged several bridges, cutting off whole communities. Mountainous areas experienced severe landslides, destroying homes and farmlands.

Wafula said there is urgent need for food and relief supplies such as water purification tablets, blankets and mosquito nets, among other items.

Some roads especially in Kilembe are now impassable (Photo courtesy of redpepper.co.ug)
Harold Carter

Harold Carter, pastor of New Shiloh Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, in the United States, died on May 30. He was 76 years old.

Carter was a longtime supporter of the Baptist World Alliance® and served on a number of its committees, commissions and workgroups, including the Executive Committee, the Division of Evangelism and Education Executive Committee, the Commission on Baptist Worship and Spirituality, the Church Renewal Workgroup and the National Evangelism Workgroup.

He became pastor of New Shiloh in 1965 and led the congregation to significant numerical growth and ministerial reach. The church converted what was once a blighted and rundown part of Baltimore into the New Shiloh Village Center that not only includes a place of worship, but also a child development center, a mechanic engineering garage to train community persons in hi-tech auto mechanics, a computer center, a senior citizens recreation center and facilities for health services. New Shiloh also operates a School of Music, has a music studio and provides facilities for artists.

Carter was involved in the civil rights movement beginning when he was a student at Alabama State College in the 1950s, becoming a follower of Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy. He became one of the leaders of the Lynchburg Improvement Association while pastor of Court Street Baptist in Lynchburg, Virginia, and was influential in having King visit Lynchburg to strengthen the civil rights movement there.

At the height of the civil rights campaign in the 1960s, he was chair of the Baltimore chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the main national civil rights organization founded and led by King and Abernathy. After King’s death, he led the Baltimore Chapter of the Poor People’s Campaign that led to a gathering in Washington, DC, to call on the United States to address the concerns of the poor.

Carter has mentored dozens of other pastors and ministers into the Christian ministry. His books include The Prayer Tradition of Black People, Building Disciples in the Local Church and America Where Are You Going?

He earned degrees from Alabama State College, St. Mary’s Ecumenical University in Baltimore and Colgate Bexley Hall/ Crozer Seminary in Rochester, New York.

He was predeceased by his wife of 48 years, Weptanomah, in 2006, and is survived by son, Harold Jr., and daughter, Weptanomah.

Funeral services were held on June 7 at New Shiloh Baptist Church.

Wilbert Donald Gough,
Life Isn’t Fair – But God Is,
CrossBooks, 2012

The proceeds from this book of sermons are dedicated “to Missions and to Charitable Institutions, that more of God’s love and forgiving grace in Jesus Christ may be enjoyed.” In the book Gough offers help to all who desire to deal with the everyday issues of life.

William Pinson, Baptists and Religious Liberty: The Freedom Road,
BaptistWay Press, 2007
David Lagergren was a former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and general secretary of the Baptist Union of Sweden (BUS), who died on May 4 in Stockholm. He was 94 years old.

Prior to serving the BWA, Lagergren was a missionary to the Belgian Congo from 1952-1956. After leaving Congo, he taught at his alma mater, Bethel Seminary, serving as the school’s rector (president) from 1958–1971. He became general secretary of the BUS in 1972 and served until his retirement in 1984.

He was BWA vice president from 1975-1980 and was, at various times, a member of the BWA General Council, the Executive Committee, the Committee on Relief and Development, and chair of the Executive Committee of the Division of Study and Research.

Lagergren played a key role in the local planning arrangements for the Baptist World Congress that was held in Stockholm in 1975.

He is a past president of the European Baptist Federation (EBF), one of six regional fellowships of the BWA.

Lagergren earned degrees from the Swedish Baptist Seminary (Bethel Seminary) and from the Department of Theology at Uppsala University.

He leaves behind wife, Agda and children.

Duke McCall was a major figure of note among Baptists in the United States. He was president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) from 1980-1985, died on April 2 in the state of Florida in the United States. He was 98 years old.

McCall attended his first BWA event as a 16 year old in 1931, the Baptist Youth World Conference in Prague, Czechoslovakia (Now in the Czech Republic). After his election to the BWA Executive Committee in 1947, he held a number of other positions within the international body over the next several decades. He served as a member of the General Council, the Commission on Freedom, Justice and Peace and co-chaired the Commission on Baptist Doctrine. McCall participated in nomination committees and committees charged with reviewing the BWA constitution.

BWA President John Upton said “Dr. McCall was a big influence on my life as a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary while he was president. He was a true Baptist statesman, a world leader and a scholar. His influence will be long lasting. We are grateful for his leadership and friendship in the BWA.”

“I was among those who elected Duke McCall as BWA president at the 15th Baptist World Congress in Los Angeles in 1980,” said BWA General Secretary Neville Callam. “Soon after my election as BWA general secretary, I had the rich fortune of a memorable meeting with him during BWA celebrations in Atlanta, Georgia, in October 2007.”

Callam stated that “as BWA general secretary, I have had good reason, again and again, to review McCall’s addresses to the BWA Executive Committee and General Council. I have benefitted from the expansiveness of his vision of the BWA mission, the depth of his appreciation for the extensiveness of BWA’s potential reach, and the deep commitment that marked his engagement to help BWA secure the physical infrastructure to support its ongoing ministry.”

Several significant developments occurred during McCall’s BWA presidency. He supported the internationalization of the organization, which had started in earnest in the 1970s. He endorsed the formation of and inclusion of regional bodies within the global organization, including the All Africa Baptist Fellowship and the Union of Baptists in Latin America, which gained formal recognition during McCall’s tenure.

McCall strongly advocated that the BWA provide travel scholarships to facilitate the attendance and participation of Baptist leaders from around the world at its gatherings and meetings. The decision to create such a fund was formalized in 1985.

The first Baptist International Conference on Theological Education, which is normally held every five years, was convened in the state of North Carolina in the United States in 1982.

It was during McCall’s presidency that a search began for more suitable offices for the BWA. A new headquarters building was purchased in McLean, Virginia, and dedicated in 1985, moving from its location in the heart of Washington, DC. The BWA moved to its present location in Falls Church, Virginia, in 2001.

McCall was a major figure of note among Baptists in the United States. He was president of the Baptist Bible Institute of New Orleans, now known as New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1943 and became executive secretary-treasurer of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1946.

He served as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the state of Kentucky from 1951 to 1982, during which time the student body grew from 800 to more than 2,000 students. Soon after becoming president, McCall integrated the seminary’s classrooms in defiance of Kentucky’s segregationist state law. At the height of the civil rights movement, McCall invited Martin Luther King Jr. to speak on campus.

He held degrees from Furman University in South Carolina and Southern Seminary and was the recipient of several honorary doctoral degrees.

Callam said the BWA had plans to honor McCall. “What was intended as a surprise event is actually being planned for the upcoming BWA Annual Gathering in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, in July. It is a Joint Session being organized by the BWA Commission on Theological Education and Leadership Formation and the Commission on Ministry, where we are planning to celebrate the outstanding contribution of Duke Kimbrough McCall.”

Despite McCall’s passing, the BWA leader indicated that “the Joint Session will still be held, but in circumstances not as auspicious as earlier anticipated. Baptists around the world have lost a wonderful brother, a valiant witness and a disciple of Christ who was faithful to the end.”

McCall is survived by wife, Winona, and sons Duke Jr., Douglas, John, and Michael. He was predeceased by his first wife, Marguerite, in 1983.

Funeral services were held April 8 at Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville, followed by burial at Cave Hill Cemetery.
One of the surprises I have had as president of the Baptist World Alliance over the past three years has been the number of weddings I have had the privilege of attending on my trips. I have attended a wedding in Cana, two in Africa, two in China, Malaysia and one in Nicaragua. In several of these weddings I had the privilege of presiding over the wedding and in others was able to lift a blessing on behalf of the couple. The brides were all beautiful and their eyes sparkled with joy in their beautiful tribal dresses. The grooms were handsome with smirks of delight at their good fortune. One of the things that surprised me, though in hindsight it probably shouldn’t have, was that in each wedding I Corinthians 13 was read. The “Love Hymn” was always the central scripture around which meditations or readings were made.

It has been a long time since I had actually stopped to pay attention to the words of I Corinthians 13 but after all these readings I heard Paul’s closing words in the hymn anew. He said that we have “faith, hope, and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.” Let me say once again where I was when I heard these words read at the weddings.

I was in Cana for example. It was a Baptist wedding and the service was conducted in Arabic. It was a Palestinian wedding in a country where racial prejudice is high and Baptists are not even legally recognized. And they said, “… the greatest of these is love.”

I was in Africa and both couples lived in a mud hut with no electricity, no running water, and no sanitary plumbing. And they read aloud with bright smiles that challenged the African sun itself, “Faith, hope, and love … the greatest of these is love.”

In Malaysia the young bride had arrived in the country as a refugee from a warring country. Soon after arriving she discovered she was very ill and almost died. The local Baptist church had discovered her need and helped her. Through the Baptist church she found friends, help and the love of her life. And she said for all the attendees to hear, “… and the greatest of these is love.”

In China the couples were married as Christians but none of their families and friends attending were Christians. Family and friends did not understand the concept of weddings based on love, much less commitments made through vows to an invisible God. Yet, they heard the couples say, “… and the greatest of these is love.”

I found myself asking, “Why is love the greatest of the three?” Then I remembered all the times I had arrived at an airport and saw a sight I enjoy seeing every time. It was ordinary people finding each other here, embracing each other there. They were the young, the old, parents, children, couples and friends all laughing, crying, talking, hugging. Whatever might have been on my mind at the time I had to always stop and smile. I think maybe our welcome to heaven just might be like that. I guess in the end it really is only love that remains.

The general opinion is that we live in a world of hatred and greed but I don’t see that. Sure, hatred and greed are there as a big part of our world and it is real. It just seems to me though, that love is also everywhere. Often it is not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it is there. When you and I are gone do we really want to be remembered most for our achievements or do we want, most of all, to have left a legacy of love?

I have been reminded that there will come a time when all reasons and need of faith will fall away and hope will lay down to sleep beneath whatever fulfillments we have been given and love alone will prevail. When everything else has fallen away love alone will shine and will shine all the brighter, for the very face of God is love. And we, who behold it, will shine even in the midst of racial prejudice, oppression, religious persecution, war, and poverty. And it will be true … “the greatest of these is love.”
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