Middle East Crisis: Baptists in the Midst 

¡Celebration in Mexico!
Update from Thailand

The September 18 coup in Thailand is a reminder of the world of conflict in which we live. Thankfully the military action appears to have been peaceful, with no deaths or injuries reported.

The Baptist World Alliance has four member bodies in Thailand, and there are also many Baptist mission agencies at work there, some linked together through the Thailand Baptist Mission Fellowship.

Montacute says, “We must hope and pray that this action will not hinder much of the important work being undertaken by Baptists in Thailand, including the tsunami relief work in the south of the country.”

BWA President David Coffey and Director of Baptist World Aid, Paul Montacute, were in Thailand in mid-September, a week before the coup, and met many Baptists from Thailand and the Asian region.

Coffey and Montacute, met with 325 Christians involved in relief and development work from over 52 countries, at the triennial conference sponsored by the Micah Network and held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, September 11-15. Fifty of the delegates to the conference were Baptists, many working for Christian agencies around the world, and many in areas of conflict.

Coffey and Montacute were able to visit the Baptist-run House of Love for infected and affected HIV/AIDS children as well as the compound of the Karen Baptist Convention to see the Bible school and the work of Tabita, a program of weaving and sewing for women.
BWA OFFICERS
David Coffey . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . President
Denton Lotz . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . General Secretary
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BWA REGIONAL SECRETARIES
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Tony Peck . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . European Baptist Federation
Peter Pinder . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Caribbean Baptist Fellowship
Alberto Prokopchuk . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Union of Baptists in Latin America
P. Bonny Resu . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Asian Baptist Federation
Alan Stanford . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . North American Baptist Fellowship

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I am a seasoned traveler, but frogs in the departure lounge are a new experience. I had arrived just before 5:00 a.m. at the newly constructed Hungarian airport of Debrecen. I entered the departure lounge and there were dozens of tiny green creatures hopping around the floor. Others were sitting on a ledge peering through the window as if they were waiting for their plane, which I presume must have been frog-bound!

The ancient Hungarian city of Debrecen is an historic center for the Reformed Churches of Europe, hence its title, ‘The Calvinist Rome,’ and was the venue for the third Conference of the Hungarian World Baptist Association. The Baptist Union of Hungary was serving as host to over five thousand delegates from thirteen countries and it was good to renew fellowship with so many of my friends in Hungary.

One of the most moving Baptist mission initiatives in Hungary is among the Roma people. Four years ago the Union started the Baptist Gypsy Mission and there are now twenty Gypsy congregations. Two years ago they dedicated the first full time Hungarian Gypsy evangelist and, at a recent baptismal service, sixty candidates professed their commitment to be disciples of Jesus Christ. In bringing his report, the leader of the Gypsy Mission reminded the convention that God had chosen marginalized people who society thinks are evil criminals and unintelligent people beyond hope. He said, “This is not true, we have seen that when people become disciples their lives are changed. These new disciples of Jesus receive forgiveness for their sins from the same Christ who has forgiven you.”

Discipleship was in my mind in late August as Janet and I traveled to Canada for the annual assembly of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches. The assembly was held on the beautiful campus of Acadia University, Nova Scotia, and it was a great privilege to share some addresses on their chosen theme of helping churches grow passionate disciples of Jesus. There was a notable family feel to this assembly. Their Executive Minister, Harry Gardiner, is a greatly loved leader who has also served ably as the President of the North American Baptist Fellowship.

The Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches has a focused vision for growing healthy churches with a strong emphasis on developing the next generation of passionate disciples. The annual Springforth Youth Conference and the Tidal Impact youth mission tour has influenced hundreds of young Canadian Baptists, and from this pool of youth talent they seek to be creative in pioneering fresh mission initiatives in the Atlantic Provinces.

Someone who had a heart for developing passionate disciples was the Canadian Baptist leader, Richard Coffin, who was called home to be with the Lord in July 2005. Richard was always a constant encouragement to me in the fellowship of the BWA, and it was a joy for Janet and me to renew fellowship with his widow, Jeannie, during the days of the assembly.

The newly elected Vice President of the Atlantic Convention is Margaret Munro, the founding Dean of the School of Nursing at the University of Prince Edward Island. She has just edited and published a set of Lenten sermons by Richard Coffin (Face to Face with Jesus, 2006). In her preface to the book, she says it would be reasonable to say that the church service that gave Richard the greatest joy was a baptismal service and it was fitting that on one of his last Sundays in Charlottetown, Richard had the joy of baptizing seventeen people.

Jeannie shared with us that on the day when Richard was first diagnosed with cancer he made four resolutions. First, he wanted to come home from hospital. Second, he wanted to be well enough to enjoy his family. Third, he wanted to complete some unfinished business in the lives of people. Fourth, he wanted to participate in his favorite pastime and resume playing ice hockey.

Richard completed all four of his resolutions. He came home. He enjoyed his family. He completed his unfinished business by baptizing 32 people. He played 35 games of ice hockey. I am reminded that one of Richard’s favorite verses of scripture was Psalm 118:24: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

What an inspiring example of passionate discipleship.
India

Church Attacked

One person was killed when government forces fired upon a church in India on the evening of Sunday, August 20.

Reports are that worshippers at the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church (EBC) in Vengnuam, New Lamka, India, were attacked during Holy Communion. The Chairman of the Baptist Youth Fellowship, S. Thawngkhanlian, 35, died during the shooting and five others were wounded, including a sixteen year old youth.

It is alleged that a team of Indian Security Forces, without apparent provocation, sprayed the building with bullets in what some interpret as a guise of combating insurgency. The attack was condemned by two youth organizations, the Zomi Students’ Federation, and the Churachandpur District Students’ Union.

Denton Lotz, General Secretary, in expressing condolences and sympathy on behalf of the Baptist World Alliance said, “We mourn the loss of a young leader and pray God’s blessings upon his family and the youth of the Evangelical Baptist Convention, and all the families of the injured.”

In his letter to T. Langzathang, President, and Luai Chin Thang, General Secretary of the EBC, he stated, “We stand in solidarity with you and submit in prayer that the government of India will do all it can to bring justice to this case. In the end, we know however, that God is Judge and the Supreme Creator of all humanity will bring Justice on that Day when every knee shall bow and confess Jesus Christ as Lord!”

It is not the first time that the church, located in Northeast India, has been attacked. On June 1, 2004, youth choir members were tortured by the combined forces of Bishnupur Police Commando and the Indian Reserve Battalion. The church denies nurturing or harboring ‘underground elements.’

Hungary

Third Hungarian Baptist World Assembly Held

Some 5,330 Hungarians from 15 countries attended the third Hungarian Baptist World Assembly in Debrecen, Hungary, August 4 to 6.

Eight hundred and twenty two non-Baptist guests attended Saturday night’s meeting and listened to the Good News preached by Kálmán Mészáros, President of the Baptist Union of Hungary. David Coffey, President of the Baptist World Alliance gave an address, as well as Helari Puu, President of the European Baptist Federation. Leaders from other denominations participated. These included Gáspár Bölcskei, Reformed Bishop, and Imre D. Szebik, a Lutheran who is President of the Ecumenical Council of Hungarian Churches. Countries represented include Albania, Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the USA.

Lajos Marosi Nagy, European Vice-President of the Men’s Department of the BWA, led the reading of the declaration of the Hungarian Baptist World Assembly, which was adopted by the gathering. Commitments were made to religious freedom, to a European Christian heritage, to the bond of Hungarian Baptists, and against ethnic confrontations. Géza Herjeiczki, a pastor from Detroit in the United States, took over the presidency of the Hungarian Baptist World Alliance.
Bangladesh

Government Holds Onto Church Property

Despite an Appeal Court ruling in 2002, the government of Bangladesh has yet to hand over property owned by a local Baptist Association.

The property, located in Badurtala, Comilla Town, was originally owned by the United Baptist Church Trust Association (UBCTA), but was seized by the government under the Emergency Requisition Property Act. The Act, passed in 1948, was used by the Deputy Commissioner of Comilla to seize the land in 1965. Since then, the Baptist group has made several attempts to get it back without success, even though the group has successfully challenged the legality of the Deputy Commissioner’s actions.

After a series of court actions and hearings, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh ruled against the government in 2000. In 2002, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court upheld the ruling, rejecting a petition by the government to have the Supreme Court order of 2000 dismissed. Stating that “We do not have any cogent to interfere with the impugned order,” the Appellate Division ruled that the requisition or seizure “Was contrary to the provision of law,” and that “We are of the view that the property is not liable to be requisitioned under the provision of Section 3 of the Emergency Requisition Act, 1948.”

Since the land seizure, Comilla Mohila College was constructed on the property. In an open letter to the Prime Minister of the country, General Secretary of the Baptist Association, L. Sarkar, observed that the “Deputy Commissioner of Comilla, the very same person who was enjoined by the orders of both the Supreme Court and Your Excellency to return the property, now sits as the Chairman of the Governing Committee of the said college.”

With Bangladeshi authorities defying the orders of the court, UBCTA has brought the matter to international attention. As a result, Denton Lotz, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, wrote Bangladesh ambassador to the United States, Shamsher M. Chowdhury, requesting the senior diplomat to “Insist your government enforce its own Supreme Court’s ruling to return church property to the Baptists.” Indicating that the issue can be indicative that “All minority religions are at risk of having their rights disregarded,” Lotz warned the ambassador that “Baptists in the US and all over the world are watching Bangladesh and expecting justice.”

Ghana

Baptists Launch New University

The Ghana Baptist Convention has announced the establishment of Baptist University College. The new university, sited in the Ashanti region, will have its two initial campuses in Kumasi. The city campus is at Amakom, a suburb of Kumasi, and the other at Abuakwa in the Atwima Mponua district.

The new Baptist University, which will have its first student admission in November this year, will offer a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration. An international business administration course, currently not offered by any university in Ghana, will be introduced. Ghana Baptist Seminary at Abuakwa will become part of the new institution. Other campuses are to be opened in other regions of the country in the near future.

The granting of accreditation status by the National Accreditation Board has reached an advanced stage, and is expected to be completed by the time school starts in November.

Kenya

Living Water Conference in Nairobi

The third major Living Water event, emphasizing evangelism and leadership, takes place in Nairobi, Kenya, October 8-13. The conference is conducted as an integral part of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship’s quinquennial assembly meetings.

The venue for the conference is the Brackenhurst Conference Center outside Nairobi. A special combined church service is planned for the large Parklands Baptist Church in Nairobi to enable as many Kenyan Baptists as possible to share in the AABF/Living Water event.

Living Water Coordinator, Tony Cupit, described the conference as an unparalleled opportunity for key African Baptists to come together in Nairobi to develop strategies for evangelistic outreach and leadership development, and to offer these strategies to their people following the conference.

Calendar of events

Annual Gatherings/General Council Meetings:

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

Living Water Conferences:

- October 8-13, 2006 BWA Living Water Evangelism Conference, Nairobi, Kenya
- May 2-6, 2007 BWA Living Water Evangelism Conference, Thailand

Baptist Youth World Conference:

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

Baptist World Congress:

- July 28-August 1, 2010 20th Baptist World Congress, Honolulu, Hawaii
Bennas, Finland: Seven hundred Baptists gathered June 17 in a schoolhouse in the small northern town of Bennas, Finland, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Baptist movement in that beautiful country.

Baptists in Finland are divided by language into two separate unions: the Finnish-speaking Baptist Union and the Swedish-speaking Baptist Union. This celebration was the first time in more than a hundred years that Finnish and Swedish Baptists met together. This unity on the 150th anniversary is, in itself, a note-worthy sign of Baptists in Finland moving together into the future with hope.

In 1856, a small group of Swedish believers were baptized secretly in Finland. The first Finnish believers were baptized in 1870. The Lutheran state church at that time prohibited any other expressions of the Christian faith. Prior to the 19th century occupation of Finland by the Russian Empire, Finland was under Swedish hegemony. Only after World War I did the Finns get their independence.

The Swedish and Finnish Baptist Unions were one convention until 1902 when they formed two separate conventions due to cultural differences. These are still two separate conventions today. The Swedish Baptist Union of Finland has 19 churches with 1,300 members. Their leaders are Erik Liljestrom, President, and Nils E. Vickstrom, General Secretary. Their headquarters is in Vasa.

The Finnish-speaking Baptist Union has 11 churches with 700 members and a community of 1,500. Their leaders are Jari Portaankorva, President, and Lauri Kotkavuori, General Secretary. The Bible School of the Finnish-speaking Baptists is in Tampere, which is also where the union has its headquarters.

Both conventions lost members in the 1970s due to emigration and secularism. Today there is a new spirit of evangelism, especially among young people. Therefore, the theme for the 150-year celebration was ‘A future and a hope,’ from the prophet Jeremiah.

This small group of believers in Finland sends greetings to Baptists of the world with confidence and hope in Jesus Christ!
It is not easy being an Arab Christian in Israel as a minority within a minority. The Association of Baptist Churches in Israel (ABC) is a community of 3000 people – most of them Arabs – ministering in the northern part of Israel. The Association was established in 1956 with three churches and consists of 20 churches today, a living testimony in the land where the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us.

Hopes were high for this summer in ABC churches. After years of political unrest, it was time for relief. For many years, almost no one would visit the area and the local body of Christ would feel even more isolated. This summer was supposed to be special with lots of visitors coming. A praise team from Canada was scheduled to speak at the conference of Rama Maranatha Baptist Church; a group from England was planning to arrive in Cana of Galilee to help with the Vacation Bible School; and another group of young adults was coming all the way from San Diego to help with the summer camp in Nazareth.

Since war erupted between Israel and Hezbollah in mid-July, all these programs have been cancelled, and churches have been focused on healing the wounded souls. After a month of war, the people of Galilee were exhausted. More than 3,000 missiles were fired at almost every city and town in Northern Israel. At least thirty eight civilians were killed, 17 of them Arabs.

Many people fled their homes to safer locations in central Israel, staying in hotels or with relatives and friends. Many Arab citizens found refuge in Arab cities in lower Galilee, mostly in Nazareth, which was supposed to be safer. Nazareth nowadays is the biggest Arab city in Israel with around 70,000 residents, one third of who are Christians. But even Nazareth was hit with missiles and two little kids were killed. A much bigger disaster was averted when a second missile fell 10 yards away from a gas station in the middle of the crowded downtown area.

The people in Northern Israel have suffered badly in this war. People who did not have the means were stuck in their homes, spending most of their time in shelters, or running to the shelter numerous times every day, whenever

(Continued on page 10)
The reasons and stories of how the war started and who is responsible for such escalations are definitely many. Each would portray his side of the story. Yet the bottom line is that Lebanon went through 34 days of devastating war and we don’t know yet if the shaky cease fire is going to hold and for how long.

During those long 34 days residential areas, commercial areas, highways, bridges, power plants, all kinds of industries, airports, seaports and schools were targeted. In other words, all sectors of the society have been affected by what went on. The economy was completely paralyzed, and we don’t know yet the real magnitude of this.

Despite their resilience and experience of long years of war, the people are depressed and tired. A big cloud of uncertainty and fear hides the hopes and desires for a better future. Even though we are going through hard times, I can always lift up my voice and my heart in praise to the Lord.

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Israel
(continued from page 8)

the siren would go off. The Israeli government passed emergency laws to compensate individuals and businesses, but the nature of war is that lots of people are left behind. Within churches in our association, there are people who are in great difficulties because they lost their jobs.

In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39).

Bader Mansour is treasurer for the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel.

Lebanon
(continued from page 9)

Highway destroyed by Israeli airstrike

God. We can see clearly one set of footprints on the tough road we are walking. It’s because the Lord is carrying us! The statement, “The Lord is our Refuge and Shelter” has new meaning.

Being an integral part of this country, the church was definitely affected by what went on.
Christians in various villages had to leave and move into safer areas. Church activities and plans were put on hold, congregations suffered financial losses, and Christian brothers and sisters lost loved ones and friends.

We sought the Lord’s wisdom, strength and guidance and God showed the opportunity for ministry in such misery. The church members and residents who left their villages were welcomed by their brothers and sisters in other areas. Together they worshiped, together they prayed, and together they served the other displaced people, especially those from non-Christian backgrounds.

There were many communities and groups that we never thought we could reach, and the Lord in all His mercy opened the doors to reach those people. We provided not only for their human needs, but mostly for their spiritual needs – their hunger and thirst for the Word of God. Our schools and seminary hosted hundreds of displaced persons who witnessed the love of God. Church people were encouraged and saw how the Lord opens doors when we least expect it. We initiated ‘Baptist Aid Lebanon’ and the LSESD was like a beehive, with young men and women working day and night to respond to the needs of people. The reaction of the global Baptist family was overwhelming and I truly am proud to be a member of this family. Indeed, all walls between evangelical churches came down, all wholeheartedly motivated by the Great Commandment, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” God is in full control and His purposes and thoughts are much higher than ours.

It is in times like these that the Lord touches
And changes the hearts of people in different ways,
It is in times of despair and darkness
That heavenly light shines brighter.
Now is the time...

In these times we feel the urgency more than ever before to reach out to the people of Lebanon and the Middle East with the gospel of Jesus Christ! To reach out to the people with the only Good News, with the only True Peace, the only True Love. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

Nabil K. Costa is a Baptist leader in Lebanon and Executive Director for Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development. The LSESD runs the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and the Beirut Baptist School.
Accra, Ghana: Next year the Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering will be held in Accra, Ghana. What a joy to visit Ghana the first week of August to meet with the Ghanaian Baptist Local Arrangements Committee. The General Secretary of the Baptist Convention of Ghana, Kojo Amo, has assembled an excellent group of leaders to welcome Baptists from around the world.

Baptists of Ghana number 75,000 baptized believers with a community of more than 200,000. Their ministry includes a mission and evangelism department, theological education, and Baptist Relief and Economic Development (BRED). Church planting is an important part of the life of Ghanaian Baptists. Last year about 93 new churches were planted.

The Baptist Convention of Ghana has recommended that a Friday evening celebration be held in Independence Square, the large plaza used by the government to celebrate special days. It is the hope of Ghanaian Baptists that more than 10,000 Baptists will assemble to celebrate with Baptists worldwide. It will be a wonderful evening of fellowship and an introduction into the worship life of our Ghanaian brothers and sisters.

On Sunday morning, everyone will be given an opportunity to worship in one of the local Ghanaian Baptist churches. BWA delegates will experience the joy and enthusiasm of African worship. On one Sunday during my visit, I attended Legon Baptist Church near the university. What a blessing! Here there are no worship wars, but ecstatic praise, dancing, clapping and singing before the Lord. After an hour of such praise one is prepared to listen to the Word of God. Delegates from around the world will experience a new dimension of Christian worship and gain an insight into why the church in Africa is growing at such speed. Their worship and prophetic concern for the world helps explain the holistic Gospel of so many African churches.
A Service of Memory and Reconciliation at the Slave Castles

When we think of Ghana and Africa generally, we are horrified at the history of slavery. The Slave Castles on the Western shores of the Atlantic Ocean in Ghana, formerly called the Gold Coast, are evil reminders of the slave trade that originated there. I cried when I saw the inhumanity of man to man. Signs such as ‘male slave dungeons’ and ‘female slave dungeons’ point visitors to the horrific dungeons where often 150 slaves were packed into underground rooms; sometimes only half came out alive.

We believe very strongly that the BWA needs to hold ‘A Service of Memory and Reconciliation.’ We have reserved the main hall where slaves were purchased to hold this special service.

We pray that this will be a time of healing, repentance and inspiration for Baptists worldwide to continue our struggle of Baptists against racism. Indeed, it is proper as we are in the midst of this decade that the BWA has declared to be the Decade for Racial and Ethnic Harmony. This is the Christian witness we would give to Ghana and the world: In Jesus Christ is forgiveness and hope for reconciliation and a future.

It is not too early to begin preparing for travel to Ghana next July 2007. Every Annual Gathering is different and necessarily takes on characteristics of the hosting country. This Annual Gathering will be your opportunity to experience the vitality and growth of the church in Africa. Ghanaian Baptists are eager to welcome you in Jesus’ name.

Prepare now for an amazing experience of God’s grace next year, July 2-7, 2007, in Ghana!
More than four hundred Baptist delegates from over 50 countries were in Mexico City for the Annual Gathering, a week-long event consisting of meetings, workshops, forums, and worship services.

The event, planned and staged by the Baptist World Alliance, has experienced growth over the years, and has seen a transformation in both the content and quantity of meetings. While departments such as the men, women and youth; divisions such as Study and Research, Evangelism and Education, and Baptist World Aid; and continental federations such as the Asians and Africans met as in past gatherings, there was a new focus this year in the Mexican capital. Taking center stage were forums, with focus on issues that affect the lives of Baptist members and churches, and affinity groups, which brought together likeminded persons based on vocation, age, and other interests.

In these sessions, the BWA and its member bodies and affiliates explored issues such as HIV/Aids, the prosperity gospel, the church’s response to migration, and Christian presence and witness amongst Muslims. Theological Educators, denominational leaders, and pastors, met to share concerns and issues that affect them.
The meetings, which ran July 3 to 8 at the Sheraton Maria Isabel Hotel in the heart of the city, were enriched by worship that was multicultural, drawing on the worship experiences and practices from countries and regions around the world. Mexican songs, praise tunes from Pakistan, and South African hymns were sung.

A major part of Baptist gatherings is the rich fellowship that is shared, not only at worship, but at mealtimes as well, such as at the large Gathering Dinner that saw Baptists in Mexico joining the delegates in an evening of warm welcome and celebration. On display were cultural dance groups from the host country.

President David Coffey and General Secretary Denton Lotz guided the proceedings. The Implementation Task Force, led by Keith Jones, provided much guidance in the organizing of the event, along with the BWA staff headquartered in Falls Church, Virginia, in the United States.

Social and International Concerns

The Baptist World Alliance addressed several social, international and ecclesiastical concerns during its Annual Gathering in Mexico City held July 3 to 8. These include HIV/AIDS (see page 26) and hardships being experienced in Myanmar (page 24). A forum held on ‘Violence against women and children’ was particularly moving.

The statistics on prostitution, physical, sexual and psychological violence, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other forms of abuse were disheartening. Violence against women occurs every 15 seconds. Approximately 135 million women and girls have undergone genital mutilation. Seventy eight percent of adult prostitutes began prostitution as juveniles; 60 percent were 16 years of age and under, some as young as 10. A startling finding in one study suggests that 76 percent of prostitutes came from families that regularly attended church.

In its response to this issue, the forum states, “We must accept that these things happen and that sometimes it happens within our church family. We need to educate our people and prepare them to respond with Christ’s love and compassion….We need to help families learn how to relate to one another in a peaceful way.” Baptists were urged “To empower women to be self sufficient” and “Train people at the seminary and Bible institutes about violence against women and the family and how to respond in an appropriate Christ-like manner.”

Another forum looked at youth culture. Youth culture is to be treated no differently from other cultures, a report from the meeting noted. “Working with young people today is as much an exercise in cross-cultural mission as ‘traditional’ overseas mission work. The language, lifestyle, preferences and activities of young people in a given social context are likely to be different to those of adults in that same context.” Therefore, “In order to reach out effectively to young people, churches must be willing to meet them on their terms and at the point of their need, rather than expecting them to come to us.”

The church, therefore, has the task “To provide opportunities for young people to explore their faith and express worship to God in ways that they find relevant, inspiring and joyful.” Because young people live in a
subculture of their own, it is “Important to enable young people to feel that the Christian faith is relevant to their generation.” This can happen only if Christians “Listen with love and empower young people to be a part of our churches - recognizing that all generations shape church in ways that are relevant to their own traditions and preferences.”

Brokenness within the Christian family was discussed. The forum on ‘Conflict resolution in the local church’ admitted that “We preach a gospel of reconciliation but the reality is very different among us.” Conflicts often arise because people feel they are not being listened to or because of hidden agendas where persons are not open about what they feel or want. Poor self-awareness can also lead to conflict as persons hide behind a veneer of Christian ‘niceness’ rather than acknowledge what is going on inside their mind and heart. Other causes of conflict are the different understandings of key biblical and theological phrases as well as poor leadership.

The experiences of reconciliation of two conventions in South Africa can serve as an example of how conflicts within the church may be addressed. The Baptist Convention of South Africa and Baptist Union of Southern Africa broke apart in 1987. The following is the story of reconciliation related in the forum by Paul Msiza, General Secretary of the Convention:

In May 2000, after a series of meetings, leaders of both denominations decided to meet. Blame was being cast by each on the other. But that day they wrote down the sins of each other. The wall was covered in notes of these bad things. The following day they had communion, and began with all those notes still hanging on the wall. At that communion table they began to realize they couldn’t have communion without confessing. They were challenged to sort things out by taking the cup to the person against whom they had a grievance. Confessions were made – people cried and embraced – and then served communion to each other. Out of that came resolution with the promise that they would never go back and blame each other. The ladies took the papers and flip-charts and put them under the communion table, under the blood of Christ. That was the event that changed things, and we began to talk to each other.

Some of these issues are to be addressed at various levels within the Baptist World Alliance.

**Theological ‘Conversations’**

**BWA engages other denominations**

The BWA will begin formal theological ‘conversations’ with the Vatican Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in December. A delegation, led by BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz and including Paul Fiddes, chair of the BWA Commission on Doctrine and Inter-Church Cooperation, went to the Vatican in March for preliminary discussions. Part of the conclusion of the 1990 conversations with the Vatican was a recommendation to continue conversations. Lotz said that for 16 years the BWA held off further conversations, opting rather for regional conversations in Europe, Latin America and North America. The Vatican Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity requested further conversations and thus the BWA response at this time.

The aim of the conversations, said Lotz, is to “Give our Baptist brothers and sisters further opportunity to promote
the Baptist principles of the separation of church and state and religious liberty.” It is also “to encourage the exchange of ideas concerning Biblical faith and the call of God to personal conversion and the necessity of renewed birth.”

It is hoped that, in the process, there will be increased mutual understanding and appreciation of each other, as well as greater Christian charity. It is expected that these conversations may lead to “further action together on ethical issues, including justice, peace and the sanctity of life, in accord with God’s purpose and to the praise of God’s glory,” a report on the conversations noted.

Lotz has pointed out that such conversations have led to increased openness in allowing Baptists and other Christians to practice their faith in countries where Baptists are a minority. Furthermore, Lotz added that theological conversations with other Christian traditions are not to hinder evangelism, but to strengthen it. The cooperative action and position of Christian churches have aided in some government authorities becoming more religiously tolerant in countries that practiced limited religious freedom.

The BWA Commission for Doctrine and Inter-Church Cooperation has, over the past three decades, been engaged in conversations with other Christian bodies including the Anglican Consultative Council, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Mennonite Conference.

The December conversations with the Roman Catholics will be held at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, hosted by Dean Timothy George. It is hoped that further conversations will be in the various BWA regions.

A new General Secretary for the Baptist World Alliance will be elected at the Annual Gathering set for Accra, Ghana, in July 2007.

General Secretary Denton Lotz, who had earlier given notice of his retirement at the BWA Executive meeting in March of this year, announced the date of his retirement at the Annual Gathering held in Mexico City, July 3-8. He leaves office December 31, 2007.

In the meantime, a worldwide search has begun to replace the outgoing CEO, who has been in the position since 1988, and will have spent a total of twenty seven years with the organization. Lotz previously served as Director of Evangelism and Education and Director of Youth Ministries from 1980. An American who prior to joining the BWA was a missionary and seminary professor in Eastern and Central Europe, Lotz succeeded German Gerhard Claas upon his untimely death in a motor vehicle accident in California.

There are strict criteria and procedures set for the appointment of Lotz’ successor. The new incumbent is expected to be a competent administrator, a team builder, and have fundraising experience. Importantly, the new General Secretary should have competency in applied theology, have a mission objective and understanding that aligns with that of the BWA, and be deeply committed to religious freedom, human rights and justice. The person will have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, be a student of the Bible, and an effective communicator with compelling preaching and speaking skills.

The Personnel Committee, one of the standing committees of the BWA, leads the search, and will present a
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BWA Begins Search for New General Secretary

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The next Baptist World Alliance Congress will be held in Honolulu, Hawaii, July 2010. The meetings, which are expected to bring upwards of fifteen thousand delegates from around the world, will be hosted by one of the smallest conventions.

The Congress Program Committee has the major task of putting the itinerary together. One of the first responsibilities is formulating a theme. The theme must meet four basic criteria: it should be christologically centered and biblically based; it should be easily developed and broken down into sub themes; it should be short, catchy and to the point; and there should be very clear scriptural references.

From brainstorming sessions held during the Annual Gathering in Mexico City, July 3-8, it was clear that a strong and overwhelming feeling exists that the next congress focus on the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the church. The theme is still under consideration, and is to be finalized by March 2007 when the executive meets at the BWA headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia.

Other important items of consideration during the Gathering were topics for the congress focus groups, which are also yet to be finalized. Subjects enjoying early consideration are: authority and styles of leadership in the church, women in ministry, the effect and implications of trade and economic policies on the Two-thirds World, and spirituality within the workplace. It is expected that there will be up to 15 topics for the various focus groups to explore.

A most important concern is the worship experience at the congress. Prayer and evangelism are central as Baptists from more than one hundred countries are expected to converge on the Pacific island paradise. There is a desire to utilize and draw on the unique setting provided by the venue. There is hope that prayer services, and even evangelistic campaigns, may be held on the beaches.

Preparatory work for the congress is expected to be intense. The Mission in Action Work Group is to consider and recommend ways in which the world family of Baptists may impact the Honolulu community in mission activity; the Communication Committee is to consider ways in which the congress can be widely promoted around the world, as well as to work toward an effective communication of the congress events as they happen; and the Bible Studies Work Group is to make plans for Bible study sessions at the congress in a variety of venues and to consider speakers, worship leaders, and local coordinators.

The last congress, which marked the one hundredth anniversary of the Baptist World Alliance, was held in Birmingham, England, in July of last year.

name to be voted on in Ghana next year. This is after intense sessions of sifting through nomination forms, short listing of names, interviews, and much traveling. Anyone from anywhere in the world may make nominations.

Nominators are asked bear in mind not only the qualifications, but also the responsibilities of the General Secretary. Ambassadorial duties are included in the appointment as the nominee is to represent the BWA to international bodies and governments while leading the BWA in the worldwide relationship among Baptist conventions and unions, as well as between the BWA and other Christian groups. These are in addition to the general administration functions that go along with the office.

All names are to be submitted on or before October 31, 2006 complete with full resumes of nominees and at least five named referees.
BRYANSK, RUSSIA: More than 3,000 Russian Baptists gathered in Bryansk for the 32nd Congress of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Union. And what an exciting congress it was! There were no hotels in which to stay, but rather the 3,000-strong army of young and old believers gathered at a Baptist camp in the country and slept in tents. Hundreds of colorful tents dotted the campsite and from July 25-28 made a Baptist city in the forests. With excellent organization, thousands were fed and cared for in a magnificent way. Old army stoves boiled water for large samovars for tea and coffee. Rain and heat one day or cold the next, did not dampen the enthusiasm and spirit of this Baptist conclave that became a city on the hill, not ashamed of the Gospel!

Two large tents were put up for the plenary sessions which began early in the morning with Bible studies. The theme of the congress, ‘Thy Kingdom Come,’ was studied and discussed by speakers until noon. The afternoon was dedicated to seminars that dealt with the urgent problems of communicating the Gospel in a secular culture.

Youth Day was an emotional day which concluded with 40 young men and women riding their new red bicycles onto the stage. These youth committed (Continued next page)
themselves to evangelizing the villages within a radius of 500 kilometers. All 40 youth knelt on the stage as intense prayers of dedication were offered. The whole congress of 3,000 prayed and cheered the next day as the cyclists rode off on their bikes to begin the awesome task of witnessing for Christ.

There was a closed-door business session of 500 elected leaders from across Russia. The main item of business was to review the progress of the Baptist Union during the past years and to elect leaders. Yuri Sipko was re-elected as president. Vice presidents Piotr Mitskevich and Ruvim Voloshin were also re-elected. A service of dedication of all superintendents from the 55 regions was a spirit-filled and moving experience.

Impressive statistics were reported. Russian Baptists discussed the need for 1,000 new pastors. There are now 1,776 churches served by 700 pastors. In the past year, 66 new churches were founded. Six hundred prisons were visited. The need for rehabilitation centers was discussed. Since the end of communist repression, many new seminaries and Bible schools have been established to prepare young people for the ministry.

The problem of immigrants was an important part of the agenda of the Mission Department. Many immigrants are not welcomed in the churches. It was emphasized that Baptists need to welcome them. It was also suggested that the churches should help many who are unemployed find jobs.

President Yuri Sipko in his annual report to the congress emphasized these concerns. His very thorough analysis of the state of evangelism in Russia was a warning and an encouragement.

This congress was a beautiful example of the new freedom and maturity that has come to Russian Baptists. There was a sense of revival in the air. Many prayers for renewal were offered. When the invitation for confession, repentance and renewal was given, hundreds came forward to rededicate their lives.

In a very strong final appeal to Baptists of Russia, Sipko, in the final sermon of the congress, preached on the necessity for delegates to proclaim the Kingdom of God as a

kingdom of love. “The kingdom heals. The kingdom never ceases. Spread this love of God throughout Russia. God’s love needs to come to all. Share this love with orphans. Destroy all barriers which separate us. We have 85,000 Baptists now in Russia. Each one must win another. Share God’s love with the world. Let us decorate everything we do with God’s love.”

Baptists of the world, continue to pray for revival in Russia!
The Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF) has withstood hurricane force winds. Literal hurricanes, such as Ivan, which devastated the Cayman Islands and Grenada and caused extensive damage to Jamaica in 2004, continue to haunt the idyllic Caribbean paradise. Baptist churches, missions, and other properties have not been spared, and the lives and livelihood of Baptists have been affected.

But greater forces than hurricanes threaten the CBF. The highly diverse and widely scattered territories, many very small conventions and unions on small islands, fail, for the most part, to give effective financial support to the CBF, one of the six continental federations that make up the Baptist World Alliance. The financial storm is further complicated by the gradual reduction of funding given to the CBF by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. From a high of $333,000 in 1988, the IMB will give its last $5000 in 2007. This will bring to an end the formal financial arrangements between both parties that started in the 1970s.

The reduced funding has affected the administration. Executive Secretary-Treasurer Peter Pinder of the Bahamas, who serves as Regional Secretary for the BWA, once a full time employee, is now part-time, and the administrative offices have been closed.

The lack of cooperation from member bodies within the Caribbean goes beyond the financial. A number of associations, conventions, and unions, such as the Baptist Convention of Guyana, St. Kitts Baptist Convention, and Baptist Churches of Curacao do not attend meetings or participate in programs of the CBF.

A grave concern is the general lack of opportunities for theological education and ministerial training. Other than Jamaica, where Baptist pastors attend the United Theological College of the West Indies through which seminarians may earn baccalaureate, masters and doctoral degrees, no major theological training institution is in the Caribbean. The Barbados Baptist College closed its doors a few years ago, a victim of the withdrawal of not only funding from the IMB, but the withdrawal of their missionaries in the field as well. The Dominican Republic’s school now grants only a two-year associate degree. The Baptist Federation on French-speaking Guadeloupe enjoys partnership with the French Baptist Association in Paris, but they only receive literature and training in evangelism. Belize depends on the Baptist Seminary in Mexico which approves the Belize training program and assists with further training. A number of persons from the Bahamas go to the United States for training, but the majority fails to return home at the end of their studies.

Culture and language are barriers. Spanish-speaking Cuba and French and Creole language Haiti, both countries having sizeable Baptist memberships, do not participate. The Dominican Republic, with its Spanish heritage, is a reluctant participant.

But if one were to read into this the demise of the CBF, then one would not be reading the signs correctly. Perhaps the most obvious sign of the viability of the CBF is Caribbean Christian Publications (CCP), publishers of the highly regarded and widely used *Caribbean Bible Lessons*, Sunday School materials that are sent to diverse territories as Jamaica in the north to Cartagena, Columbia, in South America. CCP, which is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, sends its material not only to Baptist churches, but to other denominations and church groups as well. The publisher purchased its own home in Jamaica in 2004 with a full time staff of 10, eight in Jamaica and two in Florida, as well
as three mission volunteers. Though affected by reduced funding, its future is considered bright, with islands such as Guadeloupe clamoring for French versions of the lessons, declaring, “At present all our materials come from France, but are really not appropriate for the Caribbean.”

But it is the Caribbean Baptist Women’s Union (CBWU) that best epitomizes the present and future of Caribbean Baptists. Even while the parent CBF struggles, the women thrive. Led by Marina Sands of the Bahamas, the CBWU is participating in the construction of a Center for Women in Haiti, “Designed to educate and train women to develop the skills necessary to become more productive citizens.” Women across the Caribbean participate enthusiastically in the annual Day of Prayer, and give outstanding financial support through their offerings. Described by Director Patsy Davis as a strong continental union within the Women’s Department of the BWA, Caribbean women gathered in large numbers in Trinidad in July for their leadership conference as they continue to celebrate the 26th anniversary of the CBWU.

The Caribbean Youth Festival, also held in Trinidad in July, showed signs that the youth department is experiencing renewed life. Former Baptist World Alliance Youth Department president, Donald Lawrence, was in attendance, as was Emmett Dunn, Director of the BWA Youth Department. New president of the Caribbean Baptist Youth Department, Michael Taylor, has brought a vision and energy to the leadership of West Indian youth not seen in recent years.

A matter that holds great promise is the partnership between the CBF and the Virginia General Baptist Association in the United States. Signed in 2003 as a three year pact, it is highly likely that the covenant will be renewed. A series of exchanges between the Caribbean and Virginia mark and characterize the partnership. For 2006 alone, there were 25 projects. Disaster relief training and assistance offered by Virginia, and Caribbean volunteers serving churches in Virginia as Vacation Bible School instructors and teachers, as well as preachers, are among the exchanges already completed.

A most heartening feature of Caribbean Baptist life is the strong sense of independence that exists. The Belize Baptist Convention reports, “The last IMB missionary left in June 2003, but this has proven to be a blessing, as it has made (us) more independent.” The Belize church further reports that it commissions “local missionaries...for service in both national and international missions.”

Even in the financial affairs of the CBF, there is hope. Whereas member contribution from the Caribbean was as low as 3 percent in 1994, it jumped to 33 percent in 2004. While in 1994 Caribbean territories gave only $10,000, the figure rose to $43,000 in 2004. Four member bodies, the Jamaica Baptist Union, Cayman Islands Baptist Mission, Bermuda Baptist Fellowship, and Bahamas National Baptist Missionary & Educational Convention are the largest financial supporters.

New president Burchell Taylor, elected in July, and one of the Caribbean’s most gifted speakers and intellectuals, is excited about the future of the CBF. The Jamaican, who succeeds Barbadian Vincent Wood who served eleven years as president, has a big vision. He sees the CBF becoming a movement, not just a fellowship. “We should take God seriously and not fall back on false excuses and explanations for our unfaithfulness,” he told the General Assembly in Trinidad.

One major personnel change was the retirement of long standing director of the CCP, Arthur Edgar, who served in that capacity for twenty six years. He is replaced by his deputy and fellow Jamaican, Gillian Francis.

The CBF has a membership of 30 associations, conventions and unions from mainly English-speaking countries, but also including French, Spanish and Dutch speakers. Member bodies range from as small as two churches to large conventions such as Jamaica and the Bahamas with more than 300 churches each. Its assembly, held every five years, took place July 24 to 27 this year in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Burchell Taylor of Jamaica, new President of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship
The Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) is one of the largest in the world with more than one million members. In 1995, the convention had a little under 500,000 believers with approximately 3,500 churches. The incredible growth defies realities of oppression, repression, and poverty.

While Baptist witness in this Asian country began with American missionaries, the growth is due almost exclusively to the work of its own citizens who have a burning commitment to mission. Overseas mission workers are banned by the military junta that has ruled the nation since the early sixties.

This country of over 50 million has only a six percent Christian population among a sea of Buddhists that makes up 87 percent. Baptist witness is largely among tribal people that are the minority, with Baptist concentration among the Karen, the Kachins and the Chins, who together with most of the other 132 ethnic groups make up just 32 percent. The majority Burman make up 68 percent.

The MBC is excited about the progress and prospects of the growing church despite the risks Baptists face. The situation has been compounded by the fact that the Baptist church ministers largely among tribal groups that suffer from the military government. Members from Karen State, largely made up of the Karen tribe, are often arrested, interrogated, and even tortured.

The Baptist World Alliance, taking note of the dangers faced by Myanmar citizens, declared in a resolution passed by the General Council in July that it “Affirms our solidarity with the civil populations of Myanmar as they suffer under hardships imposed by the military regime in power since 1962.” The resolution further “Requests the United Nations to take appropriate action for the protection of the lives and rights of Myanmar citizens, including their right to religious freedom.”

But even while the world quibbles about human rights in the country, the churches are growing.

(Continued next page)
Lotz’s letter, copied to United States President George Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain, and two US congressmen, seeks response to a long standing case of general abuse of the Karen people, tens of thousands of who are refugees on the border of Thailand and Myanmar, living in nine refugee camps.

The BWA has long taken an interest in the Karen people, the majority of whom are in Myanmar, the country with one of the largest Baptist constituencies in Asia. In 2000, the BWA gave its prestigious Human Rights Award to ‘Rev. Simon’ of Myanmar, principal of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School, for his work among refugees on the Thai border. Over the past decade, more than 240 Baptist congregations were established in the refugee camps, mainly among the Karens. 32-member AIDS commission to help counter the growing threat of the international pandemic.

Nestled beside India, South China, and Thailand, Myanmar, which had its name officially changed from Burma in 1989, was first visited by Americans Adoniram and Ann Judson in 1813. The Judsons were in Myanmar six years before their first convert was baptized. Adoniram Judson’s missionary tenure lasted almost 40 years. His work included translating the Bible into Burmese, which was completed in 1834. George Dana Boardman, another American, began work among the Karen peoples in 1828.

The MBC has forged links with international bodies. The mission of the MBC is, in addition to the spread of the Gospel, aimed at meeting the needs of people. The Golden Baptist Mission reaches primarily Buddhists; the Christian Service Development Task Force is aimed at development work to upgrade the poor; the Micro Credit Program offers small loans; and the MBC works with the TEAR Fund in a capacity building program aimed at leaders. As an attempt to help shore up the agricultural base, the mainstay of the Myanmar economy, the MBC works with Heifer International and gives money to farmers for animal breeding. In addition, in 1992, the convention created a

The convention operates the Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), the leading Christian seminary in the country. Throughout its history, MIT has served as the highest institution of Christian theological education in Myanmar, with students from 23 ethnic groups receiving their training there. It serves Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and other Protestant groups, which are the other major churches, along with the Roman Catholic Church, in the country.

The BWA, in its resolution passed in Mexico City, rejoices with Myanmar Baptists “In their continued growth and their faithful pursuit of worship, witness, service and obedience to Jesus as Lord.”

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We sat beside each other in the tiny church in Capricorn, one of Cape Town’s shanty areas, as the rain pelted the galvanized roof. Her face, so young, framed by the turban on her head, was sad. She folded her arms as she held herself together and waited for a bowl of soup. I knew her status but pretended ignorance. “How are you?” I asked.

“Ok” she replied, “but did you know I was ‘sick’?”

“Yes,” I said. “Are you alone here?” I pressed on. “Yes,” she said. “And why don’t you want to go back home to your family?” I asked. At first silence, and then she replied, “That’s a long story. I don’t want to go into it now. I don’t want them to know.”

At first when Pauline* found out, she wanted to kill herself. Shame, stigma, despair, poverty, ignorance and lifestyle form a complex and complicated set of problems that are the fertile soil in which this virus flourishes here in the deep south of Cape Town and throughout South Africa. It is now estimated that in South Africa, more than five and a half million people are infected with AIDS and almost one in five people between the ages of 15 and 49 has the virus. The United Nations 2005 report says HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa shows “No evidence of decline.” The life expectancy for the average South African is now 47 years for men and 49 for women.

All of these dreary statistics take on flesh and blood where I serve, but I also see, among HIV/AIDS people, hope, faith and love that are the pillars of our faith in Jesus Christ.

**Stigma or Shame**

To carry the HIV virus is a fate worse than death, ignorance or poverty. Once people know you are ‘sick,’ you are shunned like the leper of old. Worse, the smell of death hangs over you which repel people as it makes them fear contact with you. A newspaper reported the story of a young man hacked to death by a relative because he was HIV positive. One young woman I met refused to get tested, even after her young daughter was also sick. After finally being tested, she learned both she and her five year old daughter are positive.

Of all the people I interviewed, only two allowed me to use their real names and I am not allowed to use their pictures. “I don’t want my son to know as yet,” one woman told me. Repeatedly, the people to whom I spoke say their family has no idea. One woman dropped out of a sewing class we started at Living Hope, because she was uncomfortable that there were people from the community there who did not have the virus. Another told me that even in the use of the communal toilets in the settlements, a person identified with the virus is avoided. “If you are sick,” she said, “No one will go in after you.”

**Poverty/Lifestyle**

I have yet to meet a rich person with the virus in Cape Town. While it is true that some celebrities have succumbed to the disease, it is overwhelmingly the uneducated, poor, black South African who is most at risk of infection. One young woman who testified at a recent United Nations hearing was blunt. “Do not tell us about abstinence,” she said. “We are poor and have nothing else to do but have sex.”

She is correct.

A report just released by a leading financial think-tank, Eighty20, finds that “More than seven million South Africans live in abject poverty on less than five Rand, or
The fact that sixty-five million people have been infected by the HIV virus, twenty-five million having died, makes it impossible for Baptist churches to continue to ignore the pandemic.

As such, the Baptist World Alliance, in its meetings in Mexico City, July 3-8, 2006, “Acknowledges that worldwide the disease disproportionately affects women, children, and those living in poverty.”

The international organization commits itself, and encourages all Baptist member bodies and churches, to “Help end ignorance, stigma and isolation by providing accurate information and open discussions of all issues related to HIV/AIDS.”

There is the need to end stigma by encouraging every Baptist church to become “A safe place where one can acknowledge one’s HIV status.” The BWA further hopes that those who choose to do so will receive “A loving welcome, care, support and encouragement without fear of isolation.”

The worldwide institution, which is more than one hundred years old and represents a community of one hundred and ten million believers, reaffirms the Baptist principle of sexual abstinence outside of marriage and faithfulness within marriage.

Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, is to lead the charge on the behalf of the global institution with more than 215 member bodies (conventions and unions) in more than one hundred and thirty countries. Already, BWAid has launched a global fund of $100,000, but appeals to individuals and groups to make further contributions. “Eighty dollars will provide a medication program for an HIV/Aids sufferer,” it notes on its website.

Sally Smith, a British Baptist who works with UNAids, and who is based in Geneva, Switzerland, hopes that Baptists will take their place alongside other Christian bodies and denominations in the fight against the disease. Stating that the role of the United Nations body is as “A facilitator of dialogue,” she says the real question on response to the epidemic is, “How do we respond in a loving and caring way and keep the dialogue going?”

The dialogue she refers to is to get people talking and informed about the disease. Such talk should take place within the church, because in some instances, the church “Is the only place where they may get information on the disease.” It is the place where many persons form, or have, their identity. Echoing the resolution that was passed at the Annual Gathering, she says “The church is sometimes a safe place that persons may make their own situation known and feel accepted.” Thus, the church should hear the voices of persons with Aids, teach what is correct about the disease, and model what is correct. Such modeling may include baptizing persons with the disease, enabling them to participate in Holy Communion, and to sit at table and share meals with others of the faith.

There are practical issues to deal with and overcome if the response is to be effective and coordinated. Issues such as the abuse of women; the sex trade and trafficking of persons; the problem of health insurance; poverty; as well as the culture of silence, contribute to the spread of the disease, or make dealing with the disease more difficult. A huge and growing problem is the number of children affected or infected by the virus. Many are orphaned, others abandoned because of their HIV positive status.

BWAid has declared HIV/AIDS as a priority during the current BWA quinquennium, which ends in 2010.
about 80 US cents a day, and 15 percent of the 48.9 million population lives well below the poverty line of US $1 a day.” Most of the income of the poorest comes from government social grants and ‘piece jobs,’ a different kind of work or daily employer.

The vast majority of people in the settlements in the Western Cape make no more than US$20 a week. The women, who form the corps of domestic workers in the Cape, and who are the economic backbone of their families, can earn up to US$80 if they can find work each day in a different house. To earn more they must leave their families and live in the homes of rich employers. Many infected women have sex with men to get money or jobs and they end up losing their lives.

Drug addiction, alcoholism and violence plague these communities. As yet, many poor people have not reaped the economic fruits of freedom and jobs are scare here in the Cape. Without a doubt, promiscuity is a big factor in the spread of AIDS here, but I am not convinced that poor South Africans are more promiscuous than other people. They just do not know how to prevent many of its effects.

**Women**

The virus is particularly hard on women. The majority of HIV/AIDS victims are women and girls. The 2005 UN report shows “Almost a third of pregnant women at antenatal clinics in South Africa were HIV positive.” A 2003/4 mortality report from South Africa showed a dramatic increase of 93 percent in the deaths of women. Twenty five percent of women in South Africa between the ages of 20 and 24 are HIV positive, according to a 2004 report.

There are many reasons for this, but perhaps the biggest is the traditional view of women that gives them precious little rights over their own bodies. Violence against women is a major concern. Troubling is the fact that several women

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**World AIDS Day and Beyond: Getting Churches Involved**

*by Calle Almedal*

December 1 is World AIDS Day. The following is a memo from UNAIDS to Christians and churches involved in HIV/AIDS ministry. We include it to encourage church leaders to take an active role in the fight against the disease.

We have struggled for years to get leaders to speak out about HIV-related issues. I have in particular tried to get faith/religious leaders to do so.

From my “look out point” I do not see many church leaders rising above the horizon to address HIV/AIDS. That is a pity because so much of the work in HIV is done by churches. Perhaps church leaders are unaware of how much good work is done by their own, sometimes in very difficult circumstances and in hostile environments. If this is the case then church leaders miss out on being very proud about what their brothers and sisters are doing in the field of HIV; they miss opportunities to advocate more for what is done by their own; and they miss opportunities to raise funds. They also miss opportunities to give good feedback.

Our experience is that it is very difficult and sometimes impossible for us to get them to see what is really happening far out there and how much is done by churches.

*You* all can tell your church leaders, at national, regional and global levels, about what you do in the field of HIV, and enter into a dialogue with them about what they do, or could do. If *you* tell them about *your* work and experiences, and ask them to make your church’s HIV work more visible, they just might be more interested.

We are not giving up on getting church leaders more visible in the field of HIV. But we need everyone’s help. Please inform your leaders about what you do, enter into a dialogue, and try to get as many as possible more engaged.

*Calle Almedal is Senior Adviser within the Partnerships Unit of UNAIDS in Geneva, Switzerland.*
that I work with only found out the status of their partners after they tested positive for the virus. This is one reason Pauline wanted to commit suicide. “He never told me he was infected,” she cried. Another woman did not know why she was sick until the doctors tested her. Then she learned about her partner’s status. “My partner just lied,” she said. The women tell me that men are reluctant to use any precaution because it is not the manly thing to do.

For the women, the thought of leaving their children without a mother is their biggest heartbreak. “My first thought was, ‘What will happen to my baby?’” said Patricia, who had a three year old child when she learned her status. Over 80,000 children have been orphaned by AIDS and it is estimated that 41 million will be by the end of the decade.

**Signs of hope**

With all that I have described, one would believe there is no hope, but there is.

The government’s role is crucial. While this is true of treatment and the availability of anti-retroviral drugs, it is even more so of information sharing. In 2001, the South African government launched a Khomanani mass campaign to improve public awareness about AIDS and other diseases. Last year the government trained grassroots communicators in 27 sites countrywide. These people, called Khomamami Community Partners, are volunteers who go door to door to teach people about AIDS. Most Christian and other organizations get some help from the government to do their work.

Now that the 2010 World Cup Football games will be held here, South Africa is even more in the global spotlight. This is good as it will take a global effort to combat HIV and AIDS here and on the continent. While the members of the G8 countries have not exactly lived up to their promises, the intention to eradicate much of the debt that pulls Africa down economically is critical to its recovery.

In July, Bill Gates of Microsoft announced a plan to fund a special Internet portal to help Africa become better known and to attract more people to the continent to increase its tourist potential.

**Christian Organizations**

But it is Christian organizations that have the greatest power to turn the tide of this epidemic. One of the first responsibilities is to erase the stigma and give people hope. “When I came to Living Hope, I believed I was going to die,” Patricia told me. Sick and jobless, she felt worthless, but at Living Hope, “They made me feel like I was somebody,” she said. Today, Patricia is very much alive. “I feel I am normal. I feel strong,” she says.

The Christian community is becoming more involved with HIV and AIDS. Both the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance have made HIV/AIDS a priority concern. Many church organizations are part of the ONE campaign to deal with poverty and global debt and other concerns.

But we have only just begun. There is still a huge amount of work to do to get more churches involved. Most evangelical churches I have seen here are strong on personal salvation and are involved in some type of evangelistic ministry to poor South Africans, but not much is said about the imperative to justice and social concern. Some pastors will not accept people with HIV/AIDS and some refuse to bury them.

Not surprisingly, many people rediscover or turn to faith in Jesus Christ once they are diagnosed with the virus. More often than not, people turn to Christ for hope. “When they come here, the doctors have told them there is no hope,” chaplain of Living Hope, Rev. Nobuntu Matholeni, says. “Our job is to give them hope.” Grace* told me, “I was so sick, I just turned to Jesus and said, you have to help me.” Now healthy and working again, she says, “I am so proud of God. I trust God to help me.”

The HIV/AIDS mountain is steep and difficult to climb. It needs more resources and workers, but we have begun. This is especially true of the Christian community. We believe that Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith will help us work with others to ultimately defeat this disease. Many of us pray regularly for a revival and transformation here.

*Names have been changed to protect identities.

Wendy Ryan is the former Communications Director for Baptist World Alliance. She now works with the AIDS charity, Living Hope, in Cape Town, South Africa.
Mexican Baptists desire to see their convention of 1,700 churches grow to 10,000 churches by the year 2010. This goal reflects the deep commitment of the Convención Nacional Bautista de México (CNBM) to evangelize the nation. Aware of the many challenges and obstacles to evangelism in Mexico, Baptists are moving forward with a vision to share Christ with Mexico and to see the church grow.

Over 400 Baptists from around the world were able to learn about the mission and work of Mexican Baptists at the Baptist World Alliance’s Annual Gathering in Mexico City, July 3-8. The delegates experienced the hospitality of Mexican Baptists, led by President Gilberto Gutierrez, and were able to join together in fellowship and worship with Mexican brothers and sisters. Mexico has the second largest Baptist constituency in the Latin American region. Although part of the North American continent, the CNBM is a member of the Union of Baptists in Latin America (UBLA) because of bonds of language and culture.

Mexican Baptists’ vision for the growth of the church in Mexico is reflected in the three main emphases of the convention: church planting, theological education and stewardship. The CNBM began in 1903 with 13 churches. Today the convention numbers 1,700 churches with 120,000 members and a community of over 400,000. In addition to the goal of having 10,000 Baptist churches by 2010, the convention wants Baptists to represent at least one percent of the 100 million population of Mexico.

The convention also has big goals for church planting among targeted groups and in particular regions. Mexican Baptists have committed to planting 10 churches among unreached ethnic groups in Mexico by 2010. Mexico is home to over 56 ethnic groups with different languages. Many of these groups have had no opportunity to hear about Christ in their own language. Mexican Baptists also plan to plant 10 churches among unevangelized ethnic groups from around the world.

These goals are a result of years of study of the evangelism needs of Mexico. Prompted by a decline in the growth in the number of Baptists, the CNBM began in 1995 to work with a group of scientific and Christian observers, both from within the country and without, to identify problems, strengths, weaknesses and challenges to growth. This study uncovered a number of things that needed to be changed in order for Mexican Baptists to minister and witness more effectively.

The convention adopted ‘Forty Agreements’ regarding evangelism and church growth based on the results of the study. These agreements are printed each year to remind individuals and churches of the commitments they made to meet the spiritual needs of Mexico. The CNBM has altered its structure several times in the past 10 years as it has sought to implement the recommendations of the study. The convention adopted a new vision and mission statement in 2002 that reflect the emphasis on evangelism. Together Mexican Baptists, under the leadership of Gutierrez, seek to carry out their mission, “To make disciples of all nations.”

Mexican Baptists realize that effective ministry in Mexico requires moving away from a Christianity tied too closely to foreign methodology and traditions. Christianity

(Continued next page)
came to Mexico through the work of European and American missionaries. The CNBM has long had ties to American conventions. Following the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the convention stopped meeting for 16 years and many of the pastors went to the United States. The Baptist Spanish Publishing House, which originated in 1905 in Toluca, Mexico, in the kitchen of a pastor of one of the churches, was relocated to Texas where it remains today.

The 1995 study of church growth revealed that churches that relied on imported traditions and customs that were alien to Mexicans were not growing. The church in Mexico needed to use the native culture. As President Gutierrez explained, “The need for the incarnation of the church among the people was evident…nothing was native to Mexico.” Preachers who imitated preachers from other countries were not effective. Many churches were still using music and methods taught by missionaries many years ago that are not relevant for Mexicans today.

The denominations that are growing in Mexico are those that have developed, as Gutierrez said, “an autochthonous culture,” meaning a culture that is original to the people or location where it is found. Neo-charismatic groups, for example, are growing much faster than Baptists in Mexico in part because they do not use music from the United States.

Besides making Christianity more identifiable for Mexicans, using indigenous theology, hymns and liturgy validates Mexican culture. “Our people have suffered, they have been enslaved, they have been humiliated, and they require a healing experience to restore their own identity. Don’t show them the beauty of other cultures—help them experience their faith in their own culture,” said Gutierrez. He encourages churches to use Mexican symbols, milestones, history, food, art and sports as vehicles to communicate the Good News.

Evangelism in Mexico requires sensitivity to social, political, and economic realities of life. Insecurity is a common problem for many Mexicans because of political turmoil and poverty. As Gutierrez explained, evangelism needs to be direct. People are tired of the lies of politicians and need the truth of the Gospel. People living in poverty and insecurity do not need to be scolded or condemned; they need encouragement and hope. Gutierrez emphasized the importance of offering the Gospel as a challenge for people to accept. People in difficult circumstances need a challenge that will enrich their lives. As Gutierrez said, “What could be more challenging than a call to follow Christ?”

At the BWA's Annual Gathering, Baptists from around the world were able to pray for the pastors of Mexican churches as they offer encouragement and hope to the citizens of Mexico. The Annual Gathering was not only an opportunity for the world to learn about the work of Baptists in Mexico, but also enabled Mexican Baptists to experience, many for the first time, what it means to be part of the worldwide family of the Baptist World Alliance. At a special event, the ‘Celebration with Mexican Baptists,’ Gutierrez said, “Knowing we are part of the BWA challenges us to believe, to act and to hope with all of our hearts.”
Does anyone care about the Congo?

War in the Middle East dominates headlines and media attention for weeks on end. As Christians we are appalled at the tragic loss of life and destruction, as we should be.

But other horrendous and destructive wars get little attention from the media. The Congo has had a civil war over the past ten years. Forty thousand women have been raped. Twelve hundred people die every day. A total of four million people have died. Does anyone care?

Because there has not been much media attention on the Congo, many people around the world do not know about the horrific agony that occurs there on a daily basis and do not impress upon their governments the need to work for peace there. The July 2006 issue of Christianity Today emphasized the tragedy and the need for Christians to be involved.

Does anyone care about the Congo? God does! The church does! Right in the midst of this catastrophe the church of Jesus Christ is carrying on a tremendous ministry in the face of insurmountable odds. Right in the midst of this suffering a Baptist surgeon, Dr. Joseph Lusi, is administering aid in Jesus’ name. Baptist World Aid is involved in helping him and other Baptists in Goma and adjoining areas as they minister in the midst of human misery.

Andre Bokundoa is General Secretary of the Baptist Community of the Congo River which has more than one million members. He is also President of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship. Bokundoa requested prayer for the Congo during recent elections. There is now conflict and confusion over the election results. There are eight BWA member bodies in the Congo. Collectively they represent two million baptized believers with a community of more than five million.

Director of Baptist World Aid, Paul Montacute, reminded the BWA General Council many times that although the media may emphasize tragedy in one area of the world, this does not mean we should forget the rest of the world. Indeed the good news is that in spite of media neglect, the church is on the ground ministering as best it can to the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Africa, south of the Sahara, is largely a Christian continent due to 19th century missionary sacrifice and as a result of the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of African people. In October, hundreds of Baptists gather in Nairobi, Kenya, for our third Living Water Conference. Jesus Christ is the living water that brings redemption and salvation. Jesus calls for spiritual and physical healing. Christ is the bread of life and calls upon those from the North to share their bread with the hungry.

October is Hunger Month. Give generously in Jesus’ name to the Baptist World Aid appeal. The media might not notice wars such as occurs in the Congo, but Christ is there for the least of our brothers and sisters.

It is not the media but God working through His church that sets our agenda.

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY
Denton Lotz

When the Media Determines Priorities Millions Suffer
OCTOBER IS BAPTIST WORLD AID HUNGER MONTH

A global hunger calculation:

+ ADD: 80 million Baptists praying and giving

—SUBTRACT: The hunger pains of 852 million people

x MULTIPLY: Our effectiveness by working together

÷ DIVIDE: All of the world’s resources more evenly

= EQUALS: Baptist World Aid responding to global hunger 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. When you give!

For more information or to donate please contact:

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