Groundbreaking Decisions in Prague • see page 10

Thousands of Baptist Youth Gather for World Conference
New Appointment to Mission Advancement

Don Sewell, former liaison to Baptist bodies for the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), has been appointed as a consultant to the BWA General Secretary in the area of Mission Advancement.

Among his responsibilities with the BGCT was enlisting Texas Baptists for volunteer positions for causes related to the BWA. Sewell is a member of the Baptist World Aid Committee.

Callam praised Sewell for his “long and well-established commitment to the BWA” and stated that he expected Sewell’s “partnership with the organization to be very beneficial.”

Sewell replaces Alan Stanford, former Director of Mission Advancement, who left the position to fulfill a desire to return to full-time pastoral work. Stanford, who was appointed to the position in 2006, previously served the BWA as Director of Promotion and Development.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam lauded Stanford as “an innovator and a gifted networker” and praised his “contribution to the worldwide Baptist movement.” The BWA leader expressed his best wishes to Stanford as he returns to the full-time pastorate.

Sewell took up his appointment on September 1.
16 **Thousands Attend Youth Conference in Germany**

In Leipzig, Germany, this summer, young Baptists from around the world were encouraged to "dive deeper" into life with Jesus, and were inspired as they learned how others are living out their Christian faith all around the globe.

20 **BICTE: A Highlighting of Challenges**

The BWA's 7th Baptist International Conference on Theological Education focused on a number of international, regional and cross cultural concerns. While Western Europe and North America struggle to find students, there is an urgent need for training institutions in other regions. Despite the challenges, theological education remains one of the most important activities of the Christian church.

23 **BWA Establishes Division for Freedom and Justice**

Under the leadership of a full time director, this new division will focus BWA's attention and action on pressing human rights concerns: "Where men, women, and children are oppressed, where churches are closed by force and church leaders arrested, where the dispossessed are ignored and marginalized, starved, and left to die from treatable diseases."

24 **Book Note**

*Home Away from Home: The Caribbean Diasporan Church in the Black Atlantic Tradition*  
by Delroy Reid-Salmon

26 **Christ the Living Water: The Caribbean Experience**

Delegates from throughout the Caribbean islands left the Living Water conference with a deep desire to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel message. They face immense obstacles, yet have great confidence in the power of God.

28 **Former BWA President Has Died**

David Wong, president of the BWA from 1975–1980, died on September 16 at 97 years old. Wong was the first layman and the first Asian to be elected president of the BWA.

29 **In Memoriam**
FROM THE PRESIDENT
David Coffey

Diving Deeper

Travel companies invite young people to dive deeper into spine tingling adventures.

They can drive a husky dog sledge for seven days across the frozen wilderness of Lapland
They can ride a bicycle for 475 miles travelling from north to south in Vietnam
They can trek for five days on a camel in the searing heat of the Wadi Rum Desert
They can ride a motorbike on a 20,000 mile journey of 12 countries and 19 time zones

But I am proud that more than 6,000 young Baptists from 89 countries opted to “dive deeper” into a life changing experience with Jesus Christ by attending the BWA 15th Baptist Youth World Conference in Leipzig, Germany. Well done to German Baptists and to Emmett Dunn and his team for arranging such a magnificent event.

As I attended the various sessions of the BWA Youth Conference I was inspired and invigorated by the passion of these young people. I was not a speaker at the event so I was able to reflect more fully on the experience of “diving deeper.”

I have concluded that this generation of young people has an infectious hope about the future. They would agree with Martin Luther who said, “Even if I knew tomorrow that the world would go to pieces – I would still plant my apple tree.” This generation of young Christians doesn’t appear to fear the future as they believe the time is always the right time to do what is right – whatever the state of the world.

They have an endless passion to change the world. Martin Luther King issued the warning that we will not only have to repent for the acts of bad people – but for the appalling silence of good people. I sense this emerging generation of Christians have no intention to keep silent. They are the ones who intend to stand up and speak out. The youngest speaker at the conference was 16 year old Zach Hunter who has been stirred to speak out on issues of human slavery. You can feel his passion to change the world when you view his video “Be the Change” on YouTube, and read his book “Be the Change: Your Guide to Freeing Slaves and Changing the World.”

They are impressively persuasive in sharing their faith. I was the secret listener to dozens of conversations during the week. Standing in a queue for an ice cream; sitting on the tram going to the conference center; walking alongside a group on the way to a seminar; listening to a testimony in a small group. I observed a transparency and directness about the way these young Baptists were sharing their faith in Jesus with one another – often through a translator!

So I was not surprised at the end of the week to meet a number of young people who told me they had committed their lives to Jesus Christ and were going back to their church with the intention of being baptized and becoming engaged within their local community.

They have a fearless commitment to following Jesus. There is an old saying – “Who is the hero of heroes?” The true hero is not the one who defeats the enemy but the one who can transform the enemy into a friend. Jesus is a hero of heroes to these young people because he was an extremist for love. In a world of hate he said, “Love your enemies.” He was willing to go to the cross for his passion. He prayed for those who mocked him, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

These young people worship Jesus Christ jubilantly as the Lion and the Lamb who shares the power of his risen life with those who will follow his way.

So I say thank you to these young Baptists for teaching me to be more

Hopeful about the future
Passionate about changing the world
Persuasive in sharing my faith
Fearless in my commitment to follow Jesus

Friends, I have no fears about the future of the church!
Baptist World Alliance (BWA) President David Coffey and General Secretary Neville Callam appealed for prayer for those affected by the conflict between Georgian and Russian forces over the Georgian breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Estimates are that more than 158,000 persons were displaced as a result of the fighting.

“Already, the Baptist World Alliance has sought practical ways in which to give expression to our love for the people affected by the war in the region,” said General Secretary Callam. “Baptists across the world are praying for the resolution of the conflict over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.”

Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, the president of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, appealed for assistance to provide shelter, food, water, blankets, medicine, and counseling for those affected by the fighting.

“We need to remember in our prayers Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili and other pastoral leaders as they seek to minister in this dangerous and uncertain situation,” said President Coffey.

Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, sent 40,000 euros, including a 20,000 euro contribution from the German Baptist Union, to support the relief efforts of Baptists in Georgia.

“We condemn this wanton taking of human life, and mourn the death and suffering of all the peoples of this region,” said Baptist World Aid director, Paul Montacute. “Baptists of the world pledge their support for all in need with their prayers, expressions of concern and their giving.”

“I urge Baptists to pray for the peace and safety of Georgia and the surrounding regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” said Coffey. The conflict “is a reminder that the Caucasus is a complex and volatile region and we have many Baptists who will have been caught up in the suddenness of this conflict.”

Fighting in the region began on August 7 as Georgia launched an assault against separatist forces in South Ossetia. Russia sent thousands of troops into South Ossetia and launched attacks against Georgia, both in the province and at points throughout Georgia.

“I applaud the initiatives taken by the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in addressing the situation in which resort to force has resulted in loss of life, destruction of property and disruption in people’s lives in the Caucasus,” said General Secretary Callam.

“We also wish to assure Georgian Baptists of our commitment to urge respect for the territorial integrity of their country,” Callam said. “We pray for the success of the initiative of the United Nations to resolve the political conflict between Russia and Georgia. We also pray for the peaceful co-existence of all concerned.”

Below: Persons flee from Gori in Georgia

Photo courtesy of Reuters/Gleb Garanich, www.alertnet.org
A tall, young white man with light brown eyes sat in front of me, across the desk. I asked him: “Did you have contact with the Gospel before coming here?” Radamés answered: “If I had known the things that I have learned from the Scriptures I probably would not have landed in prison. I come from a distant rural community. We have never heard about Jesus in that neighborhood.”

I looked up Revelation 3:20 and asked him to read it. When we discussed it briefly I felt he was ready to take the step and I asked him. “Radamés, if you have felt that Jesus is knocking at the door of your life, do you think you could answer him today?” With tears in his eyes he answered: “Pastor, I am so new in these ways that I don’t know how to let Him in.”

I looked at his hands for a brief moment. It was unbelievable that those hands had killed another person! And now he was trying to stretch the other hands of faith to open the door of his heart. “Just say this prayer with me, Radamés…” and this tall “campesino” asked Christ to come in, clean up and stay in his life forever. Can there be a greater emotion or joy in this side of eternity than that which I lived this past Wednesday as I visited the prison and saw a man get a hold on eternal life?

Elmer Lavastida
Santiago de Cuba
September 11, 2008
Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, has designated an initial amount of US$10,000 for hurricane relief in the Caribbean.

The aid was offered following the passages of Hurricanes Gustav, Hanna, and Ike.

Manuel Delgado, vice president of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba, reported to the BWA that the town of Paso Real de San Diego in the province of Pinar del Rio was badly damaged by Hurricane Gustav. “The destruction of houses is really terrible, some houses have fallen, and a great quantity has lost roofs totally or partially.”

Elmer Lavastida, a pastor in Cuba, said that 86,000 houses were partially damaged or destroyed after Gustav hit the island. He said that there was extensive damage to crops and that “the images look like a nuclear assault.”

Gustav affected Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, Cuba, and the United States, causing more than US$20 billion in damage.

Hurricane Ike, a more intense storm, which followed less than two weeks after Gustav, caused further damage in Cuba, as well as in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the United States.

All the northern provinces in Cuba were severely affected by Ike, including Moa, Nibujón, Banes, Antilla, Puerto Padre, Holguín city, Tunas city, Florida and Camaguey. “Some neighborhoods look like pictures after a bomb raid – total devastation of homes and plants,” Lavastida reported.

The state of Texas in the United States was severely affected by Ike, with estimates of US$18 billion in damage. Texas Baptist Men activated disaster relief mobile kitchens, preparing an estimated 110,000 meals a day. Baptist volunteers worked in League City, Beaumont, Orange, Bryan, Marshall, the Woodlands and San Antonio.

Hanna struck Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the United States. All three hurricanes have caused scores of deaths and left tens of thousands homeless.

Half of the US$10,000 initially granted by BWAid went to the Baptist Haiti Mission for urgent relief.

Above and below: Scenes from the aftermath of Hurricane Gustav in Cuba (Photos courtesy of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba)
BWA President David Coffey’s Advent book, *Joy to the World*, is now available!

For a list of national distributors, visit the BWA website at www.bwanet.org.

The Baptist World Alliance has begun accepting registrations for the 20th Baptist World Congress to be held in Honolulu, Hawaii, July 28 to August 1, 2010.

The event, the largest global gathering of Baptists, is held every five years. The 2010 congress is expected to draw upwards of 15,000 participations from more than 100 countries.

The theme of the congress, “Hear the Spirit,” will be explored in worship celebration events, Bible Study plenary sessions, smaller “family” Bible study groups, and in the various focus groups where topics such as the environment, poverty, mission in secular and multi-faith societies, and other issues will be examined.

Participants will have the opportunity to experience and share in Hawaiian culture. Rick Lazor, chair of the Local Arrangements Committee, invites Baptists to “come and experience our aloha spirit in the warmth of our people who come from many diverse backgrounds.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam encourages Baptists to come to the congress to “join us in the common search that will yield a sharper focus, a greater dynamism and a needed freshness in the ministry we execute on Christ’s behalf.”

The General Council, at its meeting in Prague in July, approved a budget of US$1.5 million for the congress.

A travel and hospitality fund is being established to assist persons from some developing or currency-restricted countries to attend the congress. Individuals may contribute to this fund by going to the BWA website at: www.bwanet.org

Registration forms can be downloaded at: www.bwacongress2010.org or obtained by writing to:

Baptist World Congress
Baptist World Alliance,
405 North Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046, USA

Online registration will be available soon at: www.bwacongress2010.org.

Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, is seeking to raise US$1.89 million for continued relief in Myanmar.

The figure is based on needs assessments undertaken after Myanmar was devastated by Cyclone Nargis in early May. The storm killed more than 150,000 people, displaced millions, and virtually wiped out the country’s staple crops.

Paul Montacute, Director of BWAid, along with Bonny Resu, BWA Regional Secretary for Asia/Pacific, traveled to the Southeast Asian country in August to meet with leaders of the Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) and members of Hungarian Baptist Aid (HBAd)/BWAid Rescue24.
The Women’s Department of the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches, led by Ingrid Subagyo, president, held a national women’s conference in Bali, Indonesia, September 2-5, with the theme, “Baptist Women Take Root, Blossom and Spread.” Seven hundred and fifty women were present representing 35 different women’s organizations.

One of the purposes of the conference was to encourage Indonesian Baptist women to be actively involved in the society and to demonstrate Christ’s love. The Indonesian Minister for the Empowerment of Women, Meutia Hatta Swasono, opened the conference reminding those in attendance of the many needs of women in Indonesia and the importance of their response to those needs.

The speakers in the evening sessions emphasized that women are special, created in God’s image, and called to do His will. Seminar speakers made presentations about Indonesian laws related to the protection of children, and proper nutrition for women and their families. There were special workshops related to the theme of the conference, as well as a special workshop for pastors’ wives. There were approximately 100 pastors’ wives in attendance.

Each day different women’s organizations made cultural presentations representing their region of Indonesia. The women from West Papua made Patsy Davis, Director of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department, an official member of their organization by presenting her with a crown of feathers.

The conference closed with a special time of dedication and commitment. A long ribbon strung with blank note cards was passed from one person to the next, until each woman had a card. The women were asked to write down their commitment, and then the ribbon was cut so they could take their commitment card with them. The women also took a piece of the ribbon to remind them that they are united with other Baptist women in Indonesia.

Montacute reported that the group of leaders crafted a Memorandum of Understanding between BWAid, MBC, the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, and HBAid “which we all signed, and committed ourselves to.”

The bodies represented aim to provide further relief, such as food and medical supplies, and to rebuild homes for displaced persons. Montacute stated that “we have a lot of work to do to bring this project into being.” Those present at the meeting decided “to make a fresh appeal to (the Baptist) constituency so that this project will have the funds needed.” The project is expected to last 18 months.

Rescue24, a relief, rescue and response unit within BWAid, is already engaged in relief work in the country in cooperation with the MBC. The budget for this effort is just under US$400,000.

Top, left: BWAid Director Paul Montacute, front, second left, and Asia/Pacific Regional Secretary Bonny Resu, third left, with leaders of the Myanmar Baptist Convention and Hungarian Baptist Aid

Below: Bela Szilagyi of Hungarian Baptist Aid with victims of Cyclone Nargis that devastated Myanmar in May

Women from Papua during the national women’s conference in Bali, Indonesia, in September
Every year during the month of July, hundreds of Baptist leaders and theologians converge on a city for the Annual Gathering – a week of worship, study and fellowship, as well as discussion and decisions about matters of significance to the Baptist family.

This year’s Annual Gathering was in the historic and scenic city of Prague in the Czech Republic, formerly one half of Czechoslovakia, which broke apart in 1992 after the fall of communism.

The usual meetings were held, including the Executive Committee and especially the General Council (GC), the highest decision making body within the BWA outside of the World Congress, which is held every five years.

There was much activity outside of the meetings of these two bodies. The International Program Committee for the World Congress, for instance, continued its preparations for that event, set for Hawaii in the summer of 2010. The committee proposed a budget of US$1.5 million which was approved by the GC. Much excitement is being generated about the World Congress that is expected to draw upwards of 15,000 participants from around the world.

The commissions and workgroups of the BWA are the homes for serious Baptist scholars, theologians, authors, professors and teachers. A wide variety of subjects were addressed by the six commissions and four workgroups. Of note was a forum jointly held by the Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation and the Commission on Freedom and Justice (F&J) to discuss a Baptist response to the letter sent by 138 Muslim scholars, leaders and clerics to Christian leaders, including BWA President David Coffey. The letter, which was sent in October of last year, invites Christians to a dialogue with Muslims that would, hopefully, lead to world peace. The insights from the forums will inform BWA to

Resolutions

The Commission on Freedom and Justice was particularly concerned this year with refugees, immigrants, and displaced persons. The plight of the Roma (Gypsy) people in Italy was highlighted. Anna Maffei, president of the Baptist Evangelical Christian Union of Italy, contended that a new government law requiring the finger-printing of all Roma people, including very young children, is discriminatory and unconstitutional.
as others living in Italy are not required to go through the same process. The GC, in considering the matter, adopted a resolution that originated out of discussions within the F&J Commission. Among other things, the resolution “Calls on all leaders within the Baptist World Alliance to urge representatives of the United Nations, European Union and national governments to issue a strong protest to the Italian government against such discriminatory practice and firmly request its immediate cessation.”

Another resolution called on countries to “give shelter to all refugees; develop transparent and equitable systems of migration that treat applicants with dignity; administer laws and regulations with justice and fairness to citizens and immigrants alike; and renounce xenophobia and the misuse of immigration for political repression and division.”

The same resolution called on Baptists to “instill an ethic of love that supersedes ethnic, gender and political boundaries; act as advocates for refugees and migrants in solidarity with them; and develop ministries of welcoming reconciliation and integration.”

One resolution applauded “the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding to engage in talks by the leadership of the major political parties in Zimbabwe.” The resolution invited “the worldwide Baptist community to pray for the peace of Zimbabwe; for the safety and security of all people there; and for effective witness to the transforming power of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Another resolution asked “the leaders of the Baptist World Alliance to strongly support and encourage government, corporate and community initiatives to address the causes of human-induced climate change.”

Watershed year

In some respects, 2008 is a watershed year in the life of the BWA. The GC decided to establish a Division of Freedom and Justice, to be staffed with a full time director and support staff (see story on page 23). This division will address concerns such as those of the Roma people, refugees, displaced persons, and others who experience violations of their human rights and restrictions on their religious liberties.

Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the BWA, is to rechannel its resources and energies to become a global network for Baptists involved in relief, aid, and community development (see story on page 13).

The report of the Implementation Task Force, a group formed in 2005 to work out the implications of the 21st Century Committee’s recommendations, was discussed at great lengths in two forums, in the Executive Committee, and the GC. The GC, which had the power to (continued on next page)
make the final decision on the report’s recommendations, agreed to reduce the size of the Executive Committee to 25, from more than 60 persons; reduced the number of vice presidents from more than 20 to eight; removed the vice presidents as members of the Executive Committee, except for one among them who will be first vice president; and formed a Nominations Committee that will make nominations to most voluntary positions within the BWA.

Both the Executive Committee and the GC affirmed that the GC will remain the highest decision making body within the BWA.

Neville Callam, who was elected General Secretary at the 2007 GC meeting in Accra, Ghana, gave his first report as the BWA’s top executive. The report highlighted the work of the BWA throughout the year, including the BWA’s contribution to 20 seminaries and theological schools around the world to assist in theological education and ministerial training; support given to Cambodia, Sudan and Uganda for evangelism and discipleship; and relief given for various disasters, including the cyclone in Myanmar and the earthquake in China, both of which occurred in May 2008.

Callam paid tribute to Denton Lotz, his predecessor, for helping “the worldwide Baptist movement to advance in its stewardship as an instrument serving God’s mission to the world.”

One of the highlights of each GC meeting is the presentation of the human rights award, named in honor of Lotz and his wife, Janice. This year’s recipient, Dennis Dilip Datta of Bangladesh, was honored for his work in human rights and religious freedom within his country.

For the second year running, the Emerging Leaders Network (ELN) of young Baptist leaders, mainly in their 20s and 30s, met during the Annual Gathering. Members stated that “the ELN program has become very dear to our hearts and has provided us a first-hand understanding of the height and depth and width of our Baptist expression of faith.” ELN members are drawn from all over the world, lay and ordained, some who are significant leaders within their own convention or union, and others who are on the cusp of leadership.

One of the most moving moments during the week of the Gathering was the memorial service. Persons who

The worldwide Baptist movement . . . an instrument serving God’s mission to the world.

Dennis Dilip Datta of Bangladesh, second left, receives the 2008 Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award. Sharing the moment are, from left, former BWA treasurer, John Jones, Datta’s daughter, Ornita Datta Afzal, Emmanuel McCall, chair of the Human Rights Award Committee, and BWA President David Coffey.
Baptist World Aid Undergoes Changes

Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance, is to undergo profound changes in its operations.

The international agency, formed more than 80 years ago to provide aid during World War I in Europe, will now become a “global networking agency” that “coordinates Baptist responses to global poverty by connecting Baptist aid and development agencies around the globe.”

BWAid will also give support and training in sustainable community development to the regional bodies of the BWA, and act as a broker between those who develop projects and those who offer funding “to ensure speedy and appropriate response.” It will, in addition, coordinate disaster emergency response around the globe.

The decision to change the operations and focus of BWAid was made during meetings in Prague in the Czech Republic during the summer.

The shift in focus is a response to the changing realities facing aid and development agencies generally, and behavior and expectations of Baptists in particular. Several BWA regional fellowships, such as Europe and Asia/Pacific, and member bodies such as Hungary and Australia, have developed their own aid, emergency response, and development agencies. Some Baptist churches and BWA member bodies, even though they may not have formed an aid agency, are becoming more directly involved in aid and relief funding.

A primary focus of BWAid will be poverty. The international organization will “seek to educate and challenge our constituency to live justly and promote change to address poverty.” Among other things, it will “advocate for change in unjust structures,” recognizing that “the solution to world poverty is not simply a matter of giving aid.”

had died during the past year were remembered for their lives and for their contributions to the work of the BWA or their country’s convention or union. The image of each person was shown as each name was called and a one or two sentence bio on the life of each was read.

Among the more memorable and meaningful experiences were the worship services. The sessions were blessed with rich music from various cultures, speakers who made presentations drawn from their own contexts, and a strong desire among the participants to bond with each other through the Spirit. Translation of the services into nine languages enabled meaningful participation by all.

Annual Gathering 2008 was significant in the bonds that were established, renewed and strengthened, a fitting follow-up to Accra, Ghana, and a precursor to the meetings in Ede in the Netherlands, July 27 to August 1, 2009, where the BWA will celebrate 400 years of Baptist witness and faith.
During the BWA Annual Gathering in Prague, the Church Health and Effectiveness Workgroup focused attention on the health of pastors. Three presenters provided glimpses into church life as experienced by pastors in North America, Bulgaria and Chile.

David Laubach, the North American presenter, emphasized the stress pastors feel in relating to a culture increasingly at odds with their Christian heritage. He cited statistical evidence of the move away from church attendance as the norm in the United States and Canada. Although 50 years ago it was reported that 80 percent of Americans attended church regularly, that figure has fallen to between 20 percent, based on actual seat counts, and four percent based on surveys by the Barna Group.

According to Laubach, 75 percent of US churches are declining and 24 percent are growing because they are gathering the members of declining churches. Only one percent of US churches are growing because they are reaching the unchurched population.

Moreover, Laubach reported the failure of strategies used to attract new members, such as providing parking, calling a younger pastor, shortening the worship service and evangelistic campaigns. Ironically, according to Laubach, “Churches with evangelism committees are growing more slowly than those without such committees.”

Since most US churches are small, the issue of survival assumes critical importance and depletes energy and resources. Across denominational lines, churches of fewer than 100 members said that “keeping the church going” was their greatest concern. The concern ranked number four and number six respectively among churches smaller than 150 and 250.

“Shrinking resources, an absence of biological growth, aging mainline denominational populations, mobility, a consumerist/entertainment culture, a sometimes-hostile environment, increased pastoral expectations and role overload, dramatically shifting ecclesiology, church change and conflict” are among the stress producers North American clergy deal with regularly, asserted Laubach. He continued, “Emotionally drained pastors can succumb to moral failure and personal and family breakdown.”

In sharp contrast to the picture of the North American church, Bulgarian Baptists are experiencing such sharp growth that they cannot produce leadership and buildings fast enough to keep pace with conversions, reported Teodor Oprenov, General Secretary for the Baptist Union of Bulgaria. Acknowledging that Western Europe is experiencing some of the same problems as North America, he said that the situation is far different in former communist countries.

The challenge in Bulgaria, he said, is not post-modernism, but rather post-communism. People in former

By Jim White

By Jim White

Decline and Stress in North America

Growth in Bulgaria

Teodor Oprenov

Baptist Problems Differ by Region
Soviet-bloc countries have a “gray box mentality.” The biggest danger is in the thinking of the populace. “They don’t believe in God, but are waiting to be told what to do,” reasoned Oprenov.

The rapid growth of Baptists has created a backlash from other Christian groups. Bulgaria has a strong Orthodox presence and the Orthodox religious authority is seen as the mediator between man and God. Oprenov reported that a few months ago, an Orthodox official sent a letter to key leaders in Sofia, the capital city. It said, in essence, “As the Easter season approaches, the Protestants are on the move – especially the Baptists.”

The letter cautioned the leaders to warn the people against Baptist practices, and listed the Baptists’ offenses: “They only believe the Bible, not in the traditions of the church. They only believe in Jesus, not the saints. They feed the poor, which creates the danger that people would join them because they are being fed. And, they sing lively music, which people might like, making them want to attend their worship services. In this way, people might be stolen from the church!”

Oprenov reports that Baptists believed this letter was the best advertisement they could have gotten! “One thing about the opposition we have endured; it keeps you on your toes,” observed Oprenov.

The third presenter was the head of the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Chile (UEBCC), Raquel Contreras, who represented the Latin American perspective. As in Bulgaria, the church is growing in Chile and experiences opposition from established religious groups.

In her capacity as president of the UEBCC, Contreras has traveled to many of the union’s 500 churches and has spent time with pastors’ families. According to Contreras, a typical Chilean pastor will be a married man over 30 who has at least two children. He will be poor and poorly educated.

Limited access to education and theological training creates problems. First, younger people have access to good education, including at university level. This makes it difficult for young adults to relate to a poorly educated pastor.

In addition, as evangelicals have gained influence in Chile, pastors are sometimes invited to participate in governmental or social work. Pastors who are organizationally inexperienced and uneducated do not do credit to themselves or to the church or to the denomination they represent. This keeps Baptists from gaining the social respect and influence that would benefit their work.

The greatest problem affecting the health of pastors is their poverty. “A pastor’s income is very low compared to the people in his church and in society in general. He will live in a society in which everyone has a car, but he won’t. Others will have houses, but he will not. He will live in a parsonage. Not having a place to live in retirement, he will preach until he dies.”

Pastors often work long hours in secular work to support their families. The stress of being the family provider and pastoring a church has created such health issues as ulcers, burnout and depression.

In Latin America and in Chile in particular, the pastor does not have access to public health. The position of a Baptist pastor is not officially recognized by the government and so the pastor is not entitled to health benefits. In order to receive these benefits, pastors are often described as the church’s administrator of facilities.

In order to address these problems, the UEBCC developed a center of Baptist studies for training purposes that helps to form an identity for Baptists and pastors, which includes studying Anabaptist roots. Seminaries are encouraged to change curricula to allow pastors to earn a certificate in less time. The union is also opening nursing homes for pastors and is providing living accommodations for retired pastors.

Jim White is editor of the Religious Herald, the news journal of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in the United States. He is a member of the BWA Communications division executive committee.
Thousands attend YOUTH CONFERENCE in Germany

by Lauren Weaver

"Stand up and live for you,
Speak out my hope in you,
Keep on running to you,
Lord I wanna dive deeper."

The voices of thousands of young people, proclaiming together in song their desire to “dive deeper” into faith and mission, filled the exhibition hall of the Leipzig Trade Fair Center this summer.

From Japan, Canada, South Africa, the Bahamas, India, Macedonia – 89 countries in all – more than 6,500 persons came to Leipzig, Germany, for the 15th Baptist Youth World Conference held July 30 to August 3.

For some the conference was their first experience outside of their own country; for many, it was their first opportunity to meet and interact with persons from so many different cultures.

Bible studies, workshops, family groups, evening celebrations, and a plethora of other activities made up the week.

Family groups – small groups of 10-25 persons – provided a forum for youth to share about the unique challenges they face in their own settings, and to learn about the things they have in common with youth from across the globe, especially when it comes to living out their Christian faith. As Atavak from Germany expressed, “I think it’s a good idea to see how people from other countries live their lives for Jesus.”

Each day, participants were challenged to “dive deeper” into a particular area, into deeper faith in Jesus, into deeper justice from Jesus, into deeper listening to Jesus, into deeper outreach for Jesus and into deeper experience of Jesus. The morning Bible studies, led by Nick Lear of the United Kingdom, and the evening services focused on these themes.

The evening celebrations were filled with sincere and exuberant worship, with music led by Matt and Juls Hollidge of the United Kingdom and their band. Scripture passages were read and prayers delivered by youth in many different
languages. Choirs, dance groups and drama teams from Poland, India, Germany, the United States, Jamaica and many other countries contributed their talents. The speakers encouraged the attendees to examine their faith and to change the world for Christ.

Denise de Vasconcelos Araujo from Brazil, who was elected during the conference as the new president of the Youth Department, succeeding Eiji Osato from Japan, spoke about the Volunteers without Borders program in Brazil that sends young people out to do mission work around the world. She challenged the attendees to return to their homes energized to share the gospel.

Zach Hunter, a 16 year old from the United States, was interviewed as part of the Thursday evening program. Hunter shared about his efforts to end modern-day slavery and provided an inspiring example to the youth of how a person can make a difference in the world, no matter what their age.

Asha Sanchu from Nagaland, India, spoke about her work with female sex workers in Thailand, the Philippines, and in Nagaland. She shared about the challenges she faces, but also the joys she experiences when she sees how God changes lives, and when the women are given opportunities to support themselves and their families in another line of work.

(continued on next page)
Shane Claiborne from the United States talked about his experiences in the Simple Way community in Philadelphia, USA, and working with Mother Teresa in India. He called on the youth to take the words of Jesus seriously and to live radical lives of love and grace. He told them, “People ask you what you want to do when you grow up. But what’s really important is who you are going to be.”

Workshops held throughout the week also dealt with many justice issues, as well as the topics of evangelism, spiritual growth, worship, and youth ministry, among others. “The cry of creation…why care?” “A vision for youth ministry in a postmodern world,” “Being a spiritual leader,” “Human trafficking – who cares?” and “Incarnational ministry on campus” were just a few of the more than 40 workshops offered.

Participants also had the opportunity to talk about issues of importance to them in the Global Exchange – 18 “living rooms” set up for discussion of topics like Aids, the global water supply, and social work, or set up for creative activities like writing postcards, wood-carving and board games.

The Global Exchange was just one element of the Global Village, designed to promote fellowship among youth from many different cultures. In the Global Sports and Fun Park, located next to the Tent City where more than 2,000 participants lived for the week in tents on the Trade Fair grounds, youth bonded over soccer, basketball, and volleyball games, climbing wall, and many inflatable games like bungee-running.

In the Global Prayer Garden, persons could find a quiet space away from the crowd to talk to God. They were encouraged to write the Lord’s Prayer in their own language in a book in the Garden.
The mass choir, made up of singers from various countries, performed during the final session which was broadcast live on German television.

Evening fringe programs featured youth music and dance groups from many different countries.

“This conference is wonderful for me,” said Maira from Myanmar. “We have had a great experience and we saw many cultures and many people from around the world – all of God’s creation.”

Not only did attendees learn more about the different cultures and traditions of Baptists around the world, they also learned a great deal about Germany and the work of German Baptists. During the opening celebration, German Baptists presented a moving video accompanied by a string group, singers and a mime that took the audience on a journey through German history, including the Protestant Reformation, the Holocaust and the Communist period.

Those gathered learned about the important role Christians in Leipzig played in the peaceful revolution that led to the fall of communism, a testimony to the power of prayer.

On Saturday, participants brought the youth conference out of the Trade Fair Center and into the city of Leipzig. Music groups performed at three stages throughout the city in the afternoon, and in the evening the youth and persons from the community gathered in the square for “Leipzig Live,” a program of music and interviews of prominent persons in Leipzig’s history.

The 15th Baptist Youth World Conference was a life-changing experience for many who attended. Youth were strengthened in their spiritual journey, encouraged by their new friendships, and emboldened by the knowledge that there are Baptist young people living for Christ all over the world.

As Elias from Finland said, “Seeing that there are other people who are Christian…that will continue to inspire me.”

Matt and Juls Hollidge and their band led worship during the week, leading youth into enthusiastic adoration, praise and commitment.

A group of youth from the United States who attended the BWA Youth Conference in the city of Leipzig in Germany.
The Baptist World Alliance held its seventh Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE) in Prague in the Czech Republic in July. Papers were presented covering various subjects, including the environment, and at-risk women and children. Among the highlights of the meeting was the discussion on the state of theological education.

The gathering in the Czech Republic was a representative sample of mainly theological educators, but also authors, pastors, and denominational leaders. A number of the conferees wore two or more hats – some serving as pastors and seminary teachers, or as pastors and denominational leaders, some being all three and more.

It is clear that theological education is experiencing severe stress. In the United States, theological schools are closing, downsizing, or merging. The sheer cost of running a theological school and dwindling enrollments in some schools and programs are leading to retrenchment. Yet, in other parts of the world – in South, Southeast and East Asia for instance – there is a lack of opportunity for training, and where there is opportunity, there is shortage of space.

Geoff Pound tells of the hunger of Christians in China to do theological work, attend theological school, and engage in ministerial training, and the creative approaches employed to ensure that students in this country get the training for which they yearn. One Latin American theologian reported that the lack of formal ministerial training is so grave that 12,000 churches are without a formally trained pastor. Seventy-five percent of pastors in the region are not trained, and only 1,000 or so pastors graduate from theological schools each year.

In Latin America the lack is so grave that 12,000 churches are without a formally trained pastor.
The English-speaking Caribbean has several high level theological training institutions, including at least five in Jamaica and five in Barbados and Trinidad. However, only one, the United Theological College of the West Indies, which is located in Jamaica, formally trains Baptist pastors.

Several speakers, from several regions of the world, raised concerns as to the quality of students enrolling to be trained for the ordained ministry. There is a lack of rootedness and commitment of students to the church, and seminarians are sometimes without a formed character within the Christian community. As Brian Harris from Australia put it, “For many students it is not an absence of ‘traditioning’ in a particular denomination, but the absence of any long term ‘traditioning’ in the Christian faith.” The matter is compounded because more “broken” students, with severe baggage, are entering theological institutions to be trained as pastors.

A burning issue for Baptists is relationship with other faiths. Nowhere is this more of an issue than in Asia. Lilian Lim, president for the Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary (ABGTS), a consortium of nine schools in eight countries, reported that Christians are facing widespread hostility from a variety of religious and political groups. Buddhism is on the rise in Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the Philippines.

She reported that while the church is seeing growth in China and Indonesia, it is experiencing stagnation in Japan. Poverty and huge disparities in income exacerbate the problems, while natural disasters, some stemming from the effects of global warming, are becoming more common and deadly.

A further challenge is training suitable for immigrants, refugees, and displaced persons. Too often, training does not take into account the multiplicity of cultures in which seminary graduates will have to minister. Geoff Pound raised the question of those who live and work outside of their home country, such as Filipinos in the United Arab Emirates. A representative from the Caribbean asked what, specifically, of those who travel to another context, such as another country, to be trained and return to their own context? What relevance do they bring to the context in which they minister after they have received their training from elsewhere?

Despite the highlighting of challenges, BICTE was a clear indication that theological education is still seen as one of the most important activities of the Christian church. Prospects are that, rather than diminishing, theological education will become more widespread, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. While Western Europe and North America struggle to find students, the unavailability of sufficient training institutions in other regions is a matter of urgency. Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America, in the meantime, are also developing their own theologies, grounded within their contexts. A presentation from the Caribbean states, “It is in the light of culture that scripture is understood.”

Opportunities are available for cross-border and cross-cultural cooperation, such as the example of ABGTS. In Latin America, RIBET, a network of 75 seminaries, was created in 1999 that offers advanced theological studies as well as training in the field.

For some seminaries, such as the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, and the Moscow Theological Seminary in Russia, there is a shift in emphasis from residential to nonresidential training, which holds out the prospect of increasing enrollment. More persons are being encouraged to view Christian ministry as a second or even a third career choice.

BICTE was a reminder of the central role being played by theological schools and those who teach in them.
Gathered July 26-29 in Prague, Czech Republic, for the seventh Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE), Baptist educators, pastors, practitioners, theologians and emerging leaders from the worldwide Baptist family reflected on the theme “Probing the Theological Boundaries: The Baptist Story from Amsterdam to Tomorrow.”

The program began with a session tracing Baptist theological footprints over the past 400 years. Subsequent sessions explored topics relating to ministerial formation and heard reports from member regions about the status of theological education around the globe. Participants were particularly challenged to consider how their institutions could address the contemporary ecological crisis; the exploitation of women and children; the changing forms of worship in the church; greater utilization of art, film, and other media in the classroom; and a radical spirituality that is open to fresh winds of the Spirit.

As a gathering of Baptist theological educators open to God’s self-disclosure, expectantly awaiting God’s coming reign in both time and space, we commit ourselves to:

1. Enact convictions and practices evident in the historic walk of early Baptists: reading the Bible, living the life, nurturing the community, redeeming the powers, and telling the story.

2. Welcome from our many cultures and contexts new insights in the form of diverse enactments of our common Baptist way of life.

3. Pursue theological education that involves a life-long process of learning for both students and teachers to be carried out in joint partnership with local churches.

4. Uphold the sacredness of all life, actively demonstrating our faith by respecting and caring for God’s creation.

5. Seek repentance for our failure to advocate for those who are abused, impoverished, and marginalized.

6. Prepare leaders who will equip local communities to live the Christian life, share the gospel, and engage in works of justice as expressions of Christian love.

7. Glorify the Triune God through holistic practices of worship, work, and witness in which our Lord Jesus Christ summons us through the power of the Holy Spirit to join in God’s mission to all the world.

REPORT & DECLARATION

BICTE VII
Prague, Czech Republic
July 26 – 29, 2008

The following is a statement issued at the conclusion of the Baptist International Conference on Theological Education in Prague.
Members of the General Council of the BWA voted unanimously at its meeting in Prague, Czech Republic, in July to create the BWA Division of Freedom and Justice (F&J).

The division, established on September 1, will address justice issues, particularly those related to human rights and religious freedom.

Responsibilities of the division include making representation when Christians, especially Baptists, are arrested and imprisoned on false charges, maintaining a stream of information on the progress of work in the area of freedom and justice, and strengthening the BWA’s presence as a Non-Government Organization at the United Nations.

The proposal to establish the F&J division was first made in 1999. The 21st Century Committee, established to examine the state of the BWA and to make recommendations for the future of the organization, urged the BWA in its 2005 report to pay keener attention to justice issues. Members of the BWA Commission on Freedom and Justice continued to advocate for a full time director who would “devote his or her time to pressing human rights concerns around the world.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam stated that “we can no longer delay taking the action that we believe God requires of us,” and brought the proposal to establish the division to the General Council in Prague.

Callam said that the new division “will increase our ability to uphold those in places in the world where men, women, and children are oppressed, where churches are closed by force and church leaders arrested, where the dispossessed are ignored and marginalized, starved, and left to die from treatable diseases.”

Julie Justus, who previously worked in Baptist World Aid, is the first appointed member of staff of the F&J division. She will be joined by a full time director when that appointment is made.

Christians Attacked in Orissa

Christians were the targets of violent attacks in the state of Orissa in eastern India beginning on August 23.

In response to the persecution, Baptist World Alliance (BWA) General Secretary Neville Callam said, “Unfortunate events have taken place in Orissa in recent days. These began with the senseless killing of Hindu Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati on August 23. I am disappointed by the false claim that Christians have responsibility for this murder and I am saddened by the atrocities being visited on Christians in Orissa.”

Vishwa Hindu Parishad religious leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his associates were murdered in the Kandhamal District of Orissa on Saturday, August 23.
Although a Maoist group claimed responsibility for the murders, supporters of the slain leader claim that Christians were behind the killings. Hindu fundamentalists launched a series of attacks against Christians in retaliation.

Churches, schools, hospitals, other institutions, as well as prayer rooms and homes of Christians, were ransacked, burnt and destroyed. Approximately 2,000 houses belonging to Christians were destroyed and 45 churches were burnt, according to information from Kabi Gangmei, Director of Asia Pacific Baptist Aid.

Christians were assaulted and at least 31 were killed, some of them burnt alive or cut into pieces.

Shortly after the attacks began, Swarupananda Patra, General Secretary of the All Orissa Baptist Churches Federation, reported, “All Christian villages [are] empty in Kandhamal as Christians, old and young, sick and pregnant mothers [are] hiding in forests exposed to the non-stop monsoon rains without food.”

The Kandhamal District was the hardest hit by the violence, but Christians in other districts of the state also experienced severe persecution.

“We are all under immense danger and threat from these groups…. Please continue to uphold us in your prayer particularly for the safety of Christian brothers and sisters who are now hiding themselves in jungles,” requested P. Ramesh Kumar, Principal of the Balasore Technical School in the Balasore District.

Sushanta Das of the Bengal Orissa Bihar Baptist Churches Association said that Christians in Orissa “live in fear….

The people are striving for food.” He said “the state government has opened a relief camp but Christians are afraid to go. The activists throw petrol bomb on the camp. Even though the places are under curfew…the police could not stop the furious activists from defying curfew.”

As of September 2, an estimated 21,000 Christians were living in seven temporary shelters set up by the state government.

“I appeal to the governing authorities in India to intervene to save the lives of the many who are being victimized in the current crisis,” said Callam in an August
Secretary for Europe, met the country’s ambassador to the Czech Republic in July to discuss Shabanov’s arrest.

Shabanov is not the first Baptist pastor to be arrested in the South Caucasus country, which gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 following the collapse of communism. Last year, Zaur Balaev, another pastor in Aliabad, was arrested on May 20, and convicted and sent to prison in August on charges that he beat up five policemen and damaged a police car door. He was later released from prison in March 2008 following protests from the BWA and the European Baptist Federation, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA.

Jabiyev reported to the BWA on September 4 that Shabanov was still in jail, awaiting trial. He stated that it “is very dangerous to live in our country as a Christian.”

**Baptist Pastor Arrested in Azerbaijan**

Hamid Shabanov, a Baptist pastor in Aliabad in the country of Azerbaijan, was arrested on Friday, June 20.

Elnur Jabiyev, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Azerbaijan (BUA), reported that the “police claim to have found an illegal weapon in his home.”

Denying the allegations against Shabanov, and suggesting that the weapon was planted by the police, Jabiyev stated that the arrest “was a provocation by the police,” and that it was “a deliberately targeted action.” The BUA leader asserted that “the police’s aim is to halt Baptist activity and close the church in Aliabad.”

BWA president David Coffey stated that “the BWA will do all we can to publicize among the world family what has happened in Aliabad” and that “the global family will be praying for the Shabanov family.”

General Secretary Neville Callam wrote a letter of protest to the president of Azerbaijan and asked that the allegations against Shabanov be investigated. “We believe that these allegations require investigation at the highest level, in light of the fact that the Azerbaijan constitution holds the country to the highest standards in the protection of human rights and religious freedom.”

Jabiyev thanked Callam for the letter to the Azerbaijan president. “On behalf of the Baptist Union of Azerbaijan, we thank you very much for (your) prayers and letters. It is a big support for all of us in this difficult situation in our country.”

Callam also wrote to the Azerbaijan ambassador to the United States, while Tony Peck, BWA Regional Secretary for Europe, met the country’s ambassador to the Czech Republic in July to discuss Shabanov’s arrest.

Shabanov is not the first Baptist pastor to be arrested in the South Caucasus country, which gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 following the collapse of communism. Last year, Zaur Balaev, another pastor in Aliabad, was arrested on May 20, and convicted and sent to prison in August on charges that he beat up five policemen and damaged a police car door. He was later released from prison in March 2008 following protests from the BWA and the European Baptist Federation, one of six regional fellowships of the BWA.

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Hamid Shabanov, Baptist pastor in Azerbaijan, who was arrested in June.
These words spoken at the Baptist World Alliance Living Water conference, held in Freeport, Bahamas, from August 18-22, were repeated again and again throughout the conference because they challenged, even shamed, all who attended. Each one of us, at one time or another, have failed to tell someone who needed to know that God’s beloved Son died on a Cross so that we might live.

A Baptist leader from Cuba, Victor Samuel Gonzales, spoke about his 88 year old father who lives in Havana. Gonzales shared that his father, a Cuban pastor, continues to walk many miles every day, even with his advancing years, visiting people in their homes and telling them about Jesus. A picture of him shows a frail old man, with shoes barely holding together, trudging the streets with a Bible under his arm. His testimony is, “I will not retire while people have not heard about Jesus.”

Baptists in the Caribbean are insistent that their mandate from the Living Christ is to proclaim the Good News of God’s divine love. They acknowledge the immense obstacles they face, but they have great confidence in the power of God and their own capacity to undertake “radical re-thinking,” to quote Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF) President Burchell Taylor, of their evangelistic intention and methods.

This deep desire to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel message with sincerity and purpose characterized the discussion that swirled around the sanctuary in the Zion Baptist Church in Freeport.

Following some memorable international Living Water conferences in places as diverse as Russia, Brazil, Kenya, Nigeria, Thailand, India and the Czech Republic, delegates from throughout the beautiful Caribbean islands gathered in the Bahamas for the conference. Delegates warmed to the evocative theme of “Christ the Living Water” and entered into the debate as to how best to make an impact for Jesus Christ in Jamaica, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, Cuba, Antigua, Barbados, St. Kitts, the Bahamas, Guyana, Turks and North Caicos and other islands of the Caribbean.

The Baptist World Alliance was well-represented with President David Coffey, General Secretary Neville Callam, and directors, Fausto Vasconcelos and Eron Henry. Other international contributors were Ronald Bobo, Chair of the Division of Evangelism and Education, and Dennis Pethers, an evangelist/mission enabler from the United Kingdom.

As well as preaching at the final service of the Living Water conference, Coffey conducted a moving foot-washing service leading into the celebration of the
Lord’s Supper on the Thursday evening of the conference. As one emphasis of the conference was servant leadership, this event was an echo of the example given by our Lord in John 13 when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Callam gave a substantial paper on “The marks of the Christian leader” that produced much lively and helpful discussion.

Many Caribbean leaders gave outstanding input to this Living Water conference. A young doctoral student from Jamaica, Glenroy Lalor, challenged the delegates to avoid any sense of complacency about past achievements. His comprehensive presentation about the growth of the Baptist work in the Caribbean served as a reminder that the task ahead, in all the islands, is immense. Doreen Wynter, a Jamaican pastor, offered a thoughtful message on “Living Water and the Holy Spirit,” and Cuban leader Gonzalez inspired delegates with his report on how God is working among the people of his island, bringing growth and life to the Baptist witness there.

As in all Living Water conferences, the focus and affinity groups were well led and well received. Topics addressed in the focus groups included: Living Water and Evangelism; Living Water for the Thirsty Soul; Living Water in Word and Deed; Living Water and Worship; Conflict Resolution in the Churches and Reaching the Family for Christ.

The two Living Water themes, evangelism and leadership, were significantly highlighted. There emerged a great desire, expressed especially among the pastors, for a greater emphasis on epitomized in the life of Jesus, will have contributed meaningfully to that discussion and be a corrective against any tendency to distort the role and meaning of leadership within the churches.

The expressed determination of the delegates to this Caribbean conference to be more intentional and thoughtful about how the Gospel is offered to the people of their region, and to follow-up with purpose the message of the conference, excites us to believe that the eternal message of God’s love in Jesus Christ will reverberate around the Caribbean islands with even greater passion and effectiveness in the years ahead.

Delegates left determined that no one will ever be able to say to them, “You are no friend; you knew me for 10 years and never told me about Jesus.”
Former BWA President Has Died

David Wong, president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) from 1975 to 1980, died in Alhambra, California, in the United States, on September 16. He was 97 years old.

Wong was born in Wuzhou and later lived in Guangzhou on the Chinese mainland, before moving to Hong Kong in 1949. He was the first layman and the first Asian to be elected president of the BWA.

Prior to becoming BWA president, Wong, an architectural engineer, was chair of the BWA Men’s Department and served as president of the Asian Baptist Federation.

Wong was deeply committed to laymen’s ministry, and presided at the first World Conference of Baptist Men, held in Hong Kong in 1974, during his tenure as chair of the Men’s Department from 1970 to 1975.

He was elected BWA president at the 13th Baptist World Congress in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1975, during which a comprehensive renewal of the structure of the BWA took place, an exercise in which he was a key player, having been a member of the Committee on Structural Changes and Constitutional Revision that was appointed at the 1970 Congress.

This restructuring led to the creation of the General Council, which convenes annually. According to Baptists Together in Christ 1905-2005, the authoritative history of the BWA, “The General Council assumed greater responsibility and was able more effectively to do work which had hitherto been done by… the executive which was necessarily limited in its powers.”

The BWA Division of Evangelism and Education was also created, and greater recognition was given to regional bodies. During Wong’s leadership, the BWA gave greater focus to newer and younger member bodies, granting them equal standing within the BWA with older conventions and unions.

Wong travelled widely in fulfillment of his duties as BWA president, visiting approximately 70 countries during his tenure.

BWA President David Coffey lauded Wong for not only being the first layman and Asian to be elected BWA president, but also for being “the first BWA leader to visit Papua New Guinea.” He stated that Wong “distinguished himself as a good man who served the BWA with faithfulness and loyalty. We express our gratitude to God for David Wong’s service and send our loving sympathy to his wife Lillian and family.”

General Secretary Neville Callam, in paying tribute to Wong, said, “At the time of his passing, we return grateful thanks to God for the gift to us that David has been.” Callam noted that in Wong’s memoir, “By the Grace of God: Memoirs of David Y. K. Wong,” “David describes his life as ‘full of joy beyond all expectations.’ His own testimony is that ‘God’s love has always been abundant.’”

Callam said, “We wish for his loving wife, Lillian, and his children and grandchildren whom he so dearly loved, fond memories of a great soul who has gone to be with his Lord.”

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

**In Honor**
- Gifts to the Baptist World Alliance were given by:
  - William and Annette Bickers in honor of Paul Dekar
  - Duron Rutenber in honor of General Secretary Emeritus Denton Lotz
  - Mona and Faldo Khauli in honor of Denton and Janice Lotz

**In Memory**
- Gifts to the Baptist World Alliance were given by:
  - Dr. and Mrs. William E. Hull in memory of Alma Hunt
  - Mona and Faldo Khauli in memory of Alma Hunt

**Gifts to Baptist World Aid were given by:**
- Charles and Leah Teague for Myanmar Relief in memory of Frances D. Teague
- Peter Traynham in memory of Mrs. Helen Peck Jones
- Ruth and Ray M. Brewster in memory of Mrs. Nancy Miller Gantt
Dellanna O’Brien, former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), died on September 7 in Texas in the United States.

O’Brien held numerous positions with the BWA, serving terms on the General Council, the Executive Committee, the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, the Congress Program Committee, the Budget and Finance Committee, the Personnel Committee, the Baptist World Aid Committee and the Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission. She was a vice president of the BWA from 2005 until her resignation from the post for health reasons in 2008.

She was also a member of the General Secretary Search Committee that nominated Neville Callam for the position in 2007.

BWA General Secretary Callam lauded O’Brien for her life and ministry and her contribution to the work of BWA. “She had a heart for mission to the world, and a grace with which she did all things,” said the BWA leader. “We are thankful to God for her life, and our prayers are with her family at this time.”

Mission work was a primary focus of O’Brien’s life. From 1963 to 1973, she and her husband, Bill, along with their three children, were missionaries in Indonesia. In 1989, O’Brien became executive director of the Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU), and served in that position for ten years.


O’Brien held an EdD in Educational Leadership, and worked in public and private schools in the United States, both as a teacher and administrator. She founded a not-for-profit organization, International Family and Children’s Educational Services (Interfaces), that focused on missionary kids with learning difficulties.

In retirement, O’Brien and her husband co-directed BellMitra Associates in Birmingham, Alabama, through which they conducted workshops in missions innovation and conflict transformation. In 2005, the couple became directors of Compass Frisco, an organization aimed at assisting survivors of the tsunami in Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

O’Brien served on the boards of Hardin-Simmons University, the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, the Evangelical Fellowship of Missions Agencies, and the WMU Foundation.

She is survived by husband, Bill, member of the BWA Commission on Freedom and Justice and the Church Health and Effectiveness Workgroup, three children, and six grandchildren.

A memorial service was held on Wednesday, September 10, at Preston Trail Community Church, in Frisco, Texas.

C. Howard Bentall, pastor and denominational leader in Canada, died on July 13 in Vancouver.

From 1938 to 1946, he served as senior minister at churches in Regina, Toronto and Calgary. Bentall was president of the Baptist Federation of Canada from 1956-1959, and held positions with the Baptist Union of Western Canada including acting executive minister from 1975-1976, and assistant to the executive minister from 1976-1992. He also fulfilled an interim role as the principal of the Baptist Leadership Training School, and was a former vice-president of the Canadian Bible Society and honorary director of Operation Eyesight Universal.

An ardent supporter of the BWA, Bentall served as a member of the BWA Resolutions Committee, the Officers Search Committee, the Study and Research Executive Committee, and the Church Leadership and Christian Ethics Commissions. His wife, Shirley, who died in 2005, was a vice president of the BWA from 1990-1995.

A celebration of Bentall’s life was held at Grandview Calvary Baptist Church in Vancouver on July 26.

He is survived by four children and 14 grandchildren.
C.W. Brister

C.W. Brister, theologian, educator, pastor, counselor and longstanding participant in the work of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), died on August 9 in Texas in the United States.

In expressing sympathy to Brister’s wife, Gloria, BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “Your husband was an outstanding man, an accomplished author, a distinguished theologian, a Baptist with a global vision, and a generous mentor and pastor. I am sure that all who crossed his path were blessed by his faith and his gifts.” Callam also assured her that Brister “will be missed in the larger family of the Baptist World Alliance.”

Brister was an active participant in the work of the BWA, serving on numerous committees and commissions including the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup, the Baptist World Aid Committee, the Church Leadership Commission, and the Christian Ethics Commission. He was chairperson of the Church Leadership Commission from 1995-2000.

The author of numerous articles and more than a dozen books shared published works and wrote new materials for the BWA World Impact Pastors section of the BWA website. Brister specialized in pastoral theology and pastoral care, and also taught and wrote about leadership for effective ministry.

Brister was professor emeritus of pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he served on the faculty for 45 years. He was a guest lecturer at theological schools in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Kenya, the Republic of South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong. An ordained Baptist minister, he pastored churches in Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma. He was also licensed as a marriage and family therapist.

He is survived by his wife, Gloria, member of the BWA Christian Education Workgroup since 1995; son, Mark, member of the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup and Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission; daughter-in-law, Rhonda; and two grandchildren.

A memorial service was held on August 15 at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

Bernadette Cakpo

Bernadette Cakpo, a Baptist women’s leader in Benin, was struck by a truck and killed on August 3.

Cakpo was a women’s leader for the Ouémé Baptist Association and her church in Avakpa Porto Novo. When the accident occurred, she was on her way to a Baptist women’s meeting to discuss the West Africa Baptist Women’s Conference to be held in Ghana in November 2008.

She is survived by her husband and five children.

The funeral service was held in Porto Novo on August 6.

Vicky O’Boyle

Vicky O’Boyle, Secretary to Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Denton Lotz from 2000 to 2005, died on August 23 in Florida in the United States, after a long illness. She served as a part-time receptionist at the BWA from December 2005 to March 2007.

O’Boyle is survived by her husband Tom, sons Ian and Sean, a granddaughter, her parents, and a sister.

A memorial service was held at Ox Hill Baptist Church in Chantilly, Virginia, on September 2.
We live in a very fast paced world. Not only is there very much to do, but also people expect things to be done promptly. Hardly is impatience with others manifested more sharply anywhere than in our dealings with email.

No longer do many letter writers expect that people should read, engage in thoughtful reflection and, where necessary, consult with others, prior to answering an email. An instant reply is expected and, if it does not arrive, another email will swiftly follow inquiring into the absence of a response. We tend never to consider that the original email might not have reached the correct destination. Scarcely do we tend to wonder whether the recipient is away from base and is unable to respond. Nor do we think time is needed for reflection before a reply is made to our email. We take it that the email is delivered and that it is one of the few emails the recipient has to answer. We expect prompt replies and we grumble if they do not arrive according to our expectations.

This is not the only area of our lives where we often terrorize others. Aren’t we often too hard on ourselves? How often do we manage to take time to enjoy the natural environment? Do we not rather go quickly by, hurrying to accomplish some goal, to meet some deadline, without being able to enjoy some of what God has placed in nature partly for our good? We fail to indulge the joy of the simple and the delights of the ever-present gifts God makes available where we live or work. We simply take them for granted.

Captivity to schedule and surrender to unrealistic expectation may have some destructive effects. Here is one of them. They may rob us of the joy of sharing our faith with others. Since we occupy every moment of our lives with daily commitments, hardly do we make time to share the love of Christ with others. On the train, we are reading. During a flight, we are typing away on the computer. If we are walking, we consider the benefits of a brisk pace. We are just too preoccupied to remember the joy of witnessing.

Yet, anyone who has had the experience of leading someone to Christ knows that this is a privilege that is wrapped in bundles of joy. It is an experience that is unforgettable. The sense of having served God’s purpose in helping a person find meaning in life, the sight of the sparkle in someone’s eyes as they come to see the truth that is in Christ, the awareness of the transformation that the Holy Spirit continues to effect in the life of a convert – all this fills the faithful Christian witness with abundant joy. Yet, do we not too often rob ourselves of such an experience of pure beauty?

Amidst the clamor for political correctness, we must never shut the door on opportunities to share our faith. Of course, we will do so respectfully and we do not need to apply any psychological pressure on others. When our method of witness consists in sharing the joy we know and in introducing that experience to another, the result is not up to us. The truth is that we have no way of knowing what God will accomplish from our attempts to share Good News with others about what we have received from the one who loves us. What we do know is that God offers to us and to all who believe the privilege of true self-discovery and gift of lasting joy and peace.

When last have you led someone to Christ?

There are many good things that we can do, many great accomplishments we can celebrate and many achievements we can record. But none can compare with the simple joy of accessing the help of the Holy Spirit to lead a person to the saving knowing of Christ.

Are you ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? Has fear driven you into silence about your faith? Or, are you sharing with others the Good News of the love of Christ?

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY
Neville Callam
Hear the Spirit

at the

20th Baptist World Congress

July 28 – August 1, 2010

Hawai‘i Convention Center, Honolulu, Hawai‘i

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