Baptist World

Innovative MINISTRIES
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The Baptist World Alliance has been honored with a prestigious 2014 Top-Rated Award by GreatNonprofits, the leading provider of user reviews of nonprofit organizations.

The Top-Rated Nonprofit award was based on the large number of positive reviews that BWA received—reviews written by volunteers, donors and clients. People posted their personal experience with the BWA on the BWA’s profile page on the Greater Nonprofits website.

One person wrote, “The Baptist World Alliance helps to keep the public informed of the tremendous needs that exist among people around the world. I’ve been aware of their work for some 30-plus years and I have found that their efforts to bring about unity among people so that human efforts to assist others can be more effective have been both inspiring and encouraging.”

While the Top-Rated Awards ran through the end of October, the BWA was part of the inaugural group to qualify for the year. In addition, the BWA was added to GreatNonprofits #GivingTuesday Guide—an interactive guide to top nonprofits throughout the years. This appeared during the Christmas holiday season.

“Savvy donors want to see the impact of their donations more than ever,” said Perla Ni, CEO of GreatNonprofits, “People with direct experience with BWA have voted that the organization is making a real difference.”

Being on the Top-Rated list gives donors and volunteers more confidence that this is a credible organization. The reviews by volunteers, clients and other donors show the on-the-ground results of this nonprofit. This award is a form of recognition by the community.

GreatNonprofits is the leading site for donors and volunteers to find reviews and ratings of nonprofits. Reviews on the site influence 30 million donation decisions a year.

Visit http://bit.ly/1viasp4 to read the other reviews left for the BWA and leave a personal review.
African Baptists and Evangelism

This July, the continent of Africa will host the Baptist World Congress for the first time. Baptists of Africa in general and of South Africa in particular, will joyfully welcome the participants who come to the congress for worship and renewal, study and reflection, fellowship and networking. In preparation for the event, one African Baptist commitment to evangelize their continent is noteworthy.

One of the great African Baptist leaders of yesteryear, James Tanimola Ayorinde, served the Nigerian Baptist Convention as president and general secretary from 1950-1955 and 1964-1975, respectively. He is one leader who played an important role in helping the churches devise ways and means of fulfilling their mission responsibility in Africa.

When Ayorinde addressed the 8th Baptist World Congress in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, in 1950, he announced that the light of Christ was shining in Africa. Five years later, at the Jubilee Congress in London, England, Ayorinde said this: “Baptist foreign missionary effort has been unparalleled in the history of mission in Nigeria.” He asserted that “if the teeming millions of Africa are to be won for Christ, they must be won by the African home missionary himself,” adding this: “The Nigerian Christian must take an active role in the evangelization of Africa.” The conviction that Africans have a responsibility to evangelize Africa still resides in the hearts of many Baptists on the continent.

Addressing the Baptist World Alliance Miami Beach Congress, Congolese Baptist leader Samuel Koli said that “the main work of the Baptists in the Congo is to show Jesus Christ the Lord to the Africans.” For his part, Nlandu Mpanzu of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) told the Stockholm Congress that “the church is trying to take really seriously what it means to meet people where they are in order to proclaim Christ effectively.” Meanwhile, Ademola Ishola of Nigeria urged participants at the Birmingham Congress to understand that the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is needed for ministry in “a world that subtly and brazenly seeks to mute the proclamation of the Gospel.”

The record of other Baptists in Africa – in countries like Ghana and South Africa, for example – also shows the serious commitment of Baptists in Africa to engagement in Christian mission on their vast continent. It is not surprising that contemporary Nigeria Baptist scholar Emiola Nihinlola has claimed in his book, *Theology under the Mango Tree: A Handbook of African Christian Theology*, that the church in Africa “has grown to the point of taking the responsibility to evangelise the [African] continent.”

Baptists in Africa are deeply committed to the evangelization of their fellow Africans. Not surprisingly, in each of the following countries – Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda – more than a million Baptists can be found. A strong case can be made for Kenya and Tanzania to also be included in this list. In fact, Ethiopia would be included if the seven million members of baptistic Kale Heywet (Word of Life) Church were counted among the people of Baptist persuasion in that country. Today, members of Baptist churches in Africa make up 25.6 percent of the membership of churches joined together in conventions, unions and associations within the Baptist World Alliance.

In July 2015, when thousands of Baptists from many nations gather in Durban, South Africa, for the 21st Baptist World Congress, we are likely to meet many of the Africans who are doing exactly what was envisaged many years ago, namely, spreading the Good News concerning Jesus Christ among fellow Africans and beyond their shores.

As we gather under the theme, *Jesus Christ, the Door*, may the event mark a significant stage when Baptists renew their commitment to bear witness to Jesus Christ so that people from all nations may come to faith and discover the hope that is stronger than death.
In 1833, Baptist preachers Billington Sanders, Jesse Mercer and Adiel Sherwood, established Mercer Institute to prepare young men to serve the churches and communities scattered across the hard, red clay of rural Georgia. Mercer students were not only required to take a rigorous array of courses including math, science and classical languages, but also to commit three hours per day to manual labor. Why this two-pronged approach? First, learning that did not result in the service to others would be a useless and ill-afforded luxury on the southern frontier. Second, service that was not grounded in understanding would likely be wasteful at best and harmful at worst. The founding vision of Sanders, Mercer and Sherwood was that Mercer graduates would make a difference in the world through an education built on academic excellence and a commitment to service.

Today, Mercer University continues to embrace that deeply-rooted Baptist mission of service to others through one of its signature programs, Mercer On Mission (MOM). In 2006, newly elected Mercer President William Underwood instructed University Minister and Dean of the Chapel Craig McMahan to launch an initiative that would send Mercer students around the world in a program that combined learning and service. The very next year 38 Mercer students and seven faculty members embarked on the first MOM venture that sent teams to Brazil, Guatemala and Kenya. Over the following seven years nearly 800 students have been in 29 of the world’s poorest countries working on high-impact service projects that make a significant difference in impoverished local communities.

MOM is a five-week summer school program that integrates learning and service. Students who participate must take two three-hour courses that are required for their particular program. These courses are carefully designed to prepare students to serve effectively by teaching them about the cultural context in which they will be working and by researching best-practice approaches to the problem their project will address. For example, a MOM team will return to Kenya in 2015 to continue working on a project that is bringing clean water to the village of Sisit. Participating students will take EGR 491: Water, Sanitation, Energy and Appropriate Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, and AFR 300: Kutana: Traditional Societies and Contemporary Issues in the Kenyan Context. This combination of courses will expose them to cutting edge research in hydrology and to cultural complexities of the community where they will work. Schooled in technical competence and cultural sensitivity, Mercer students will effectively and thoughtfully serve the people of Sisit.

Unlike many church mission trips, MOM is able to bring the full intellectual resources of the university to bear on some of the most pressing humanitarian crises in a way that truly makes a difference. Consequently, MOM service projects take on some extremely challenging problems. Since 2009, MOM has provided

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INNOVATIVE MINISTRIES

Hopelessness is destroying many lives.

Consider, for instance, some people suffering from schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, homelessness, frequent hospitalization, and drug addiction. One consequence of this is inability to manage one’s income responsibly.

John and Gloria Marshall believe that creative opportunities exist in the United States for faith-based organizations to fulfill a ministry to persons like these. When they established Stewards Inc., John and Gloria Marshall put their conviction to work.

According to John, the deepest conviction of Stewards Inc. is to bring hope to the marginalized communities and individuals suffering from hopelessness. “Our call,” he says, “is to be the servers of those who come to us for help so that they evidence God’s grace in action, and by their choice be the recipients of that gift in their own lives.”

As a child, John Marshall grew up in a home that was across the road from the Lawrence County Poor Farm in the US state of Pennsylvania. Growing up there, he became familiar with the issues faced by the worlds poorest countries are not the only place where a difference is being made. Perhaps, the biggest change happens in Mercer students. One student put it this way:

This trip has exposed me to the realities of the world. I had a very limited view of the world prior to this trip. Now I understand that there is suffering throughout the world, and I have gained a calling to help out. I have also received the confidence that I can make a difference. I know that I have matured and experienced so many things on this trip that will stay with me forever. This trip was definitely life-changing and eye-opening.

Preparing students who will change the world. That is what Mercer University has always been about.

Since 2009, MOM has provided prosthetic legs designed by Mercer biomedical engineer, Ha Van Vo, free of charge to more than 3,000 amputees in Vietnam.

Left: In addition to improving amputee healthcare, the Mercer On Mission – Vietnam Team also distributes food, clothing, medical supplies, and other hygiene items to those in need, many of whom live day by day in a struggle to survive hunger and disease.

Craig McMahan is university minister, dean of the chapel, director of Mercer On Mission and assistant professor in the Roberts Department of Christianity at Mercer University in Georgia, USA.
poor people, some advanced in years, who were no longer able to care for themselves. These are people who were made to work on farms in exchange for food, clothing, a bunk bed, and a minimal cash grant. John learned from his parents the importance of recognizing the dignity of these poor people and relating to them respectfully despite their immediate situation. Little did he know, at that time, that God was preparing him for a mission he would execute later in life.

After John and Gloria completed their years of committed service as a missionary couple in the Congo, the Marshalls returned to the United States. By 1997, they were in California carrying out a creative ministry that is as important as the one they fulfilled in the Congo – a ministry to homeless people.

Homelessness is a serious problem in the US. Current figures of the chronically homeless, people who are without a place to sleep for more than a year, are startling. According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the National Alliance to End Homelessness, more than 600,000 people experience homelessness on any given night in the US. These homeless people face a variety of challenges. Their homelessness sometimes results from domestic abuse. It is sometimes accompanied by mental health challenges, substance abuse or prostitution.

After gathering experience working with Rescue Mission in Pennsylvania, the Marshalls established Stewards Inc., “to ignite hope and inspire futures in those who are challenged and marginalized.” By this means, they offer a ministry to help people turn their life around through the proper management of financial support provided by the US government.

The US Social Services Administration (SCA) disburses grants to beneficiaries who need assistance to secure shelter, food and clothing. However, some grant recipients fail to use the funds for their intended purpose. To assist them, the SCA collaborates with Payee Organizations that manage the monthly grants on behalf of the beneficiaries who have a record of misusing the funds. Stewards Inc. is committed to this ministry. Essentially, what the Marshalls have done is to establish a not-for-profit organization that operates as a Representative Payee Organization.

The story of Stewards Inc. is told in Hope Reclaimed: A Plan and Hope for the Future (Denver, Colorado: Outskirts Press, Inc., 2010).

Evangelism that WORKS

by Eron Henry

There has been significant numerical growth among Baptists in different parts of the world over the past two decades in countries such as Ukraine, Uganda, Cuba, Vietnam, Nepal, Cambodia, Myanmar and parts of India.

No one factor seems to account for this growth. Features that have contributed to growth may apply better in some contexts than others. It is also presumed that increased numerical growth does not necessarily translate into greater or improved Christian witness. However, the fact that numerical growth has taken place in the instances cited here cannot be denied.

Organization and Planning

Ukraine, a former republic of the Soviet Union, experienced phenomenal growth since it gained independence after the breakup of the Soviet state in 1991. Between that time and 2012, more than 1,500 new congregations were planted. The membership of the All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists increased from approximately 90,000 members in 1990 to about 125,000 believers in more than 2,300 churches in 2012. This was the continuation of a growth spurt that started in 1985 due to “perestroika,” a political reformation movement in the Soviet Union that opened up greater levels of freedom.

This growth in Ukraine did not happen by chance. In the union, each congregation and each of the 25 regional associations has a director of evangelism. When meetings are held, evangelism directors from the different churches meet at the associational level. Nationally, the directors of evangelism from the associations meet together to make and execute evangelism plans. In this way,

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evangelism in the country is organized and coordinated nationally, regionally and locally.

House Churches and Cell Groups

Cuba and Vietnam’s numerical growth are due in part to the house church movement in those two countries. Cuba’s house church movement came as a result of government policy, which made acquiring property, constructing houses of worship and having large gatherings difficult.

There are essentially two types of house churches in Cuba: those that are a “church” in their own right and those that meet as cell groups of a larger, existing congregation. In the latter instance, most congregations are divided into zones, which are further divided into cell groups. These zones and cell groups have the responsibility to plan and initiate evangelism within their neighborhood. When each cell reaches a critical number over and beyond which they would not be allowed to meet legally, that cell is further divided into new cells where the excess membership meet. With this approach, it is not unusual for a single congregation to reach 2,000 or more persons.

It appears that a government policy meant to restrict church growth contributed to further growth instead.

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Aggressive Church Planting

Zambia, Cambodia, Nepal and refugee camps in Northern Thailand have demonstrated that a radical church planting program leads to increased numerical growth.

Since the first Baptist church was planted in Cambodia in 1995, there are now 440 churches with more than 18,500 members affiliated with the Cambodia Baptist Union (CBU). The union aims to have at least one church in each of Cambodia’s 1,621 communes by constructing no less than five churches and founding five additional house churches each year. Communes comprise five to 13 villages and will have at least one evangelist each. All 24 provinces in the Southeast Asian country have five trained Baptist church planters each.

An estimated 150,000 Myanmar refugees, largely from the Karen ethnic group, live in refugee camps in Thailand, with approximately 50,000 living in Mae La, one of the largest. More than 250 Baptist churches have been planted in the camps since they were established in the mid 1980s to house those fleeing fighting and persecution in Myanmar.

Evangelizing the Marginalized

It appears that reaching out to disadvantaged and marginalized ethnic and social groups in a society or community lead to numerical church growth. The examples are many. In India, Baptist and other churches reached out to the Dalit, formerly referred to as Untouchables, who are at the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system. Most Christians in South India, for instance, are Dalit.

Churches, including Baptists, have very strong followings in Northeast India, where populations are closer, ethnically, to Southeast Asians. Northeast Indian states are, for the most part, largely marginalized in the Indian political and economic systems. Three of these Northeast Indian states, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, reportedly have majority-Christian populations. Approximately 90 percent of Nagas in Nagaland are Christians, with about 80 percent being Baptists.

It is similarly the case for India’s neighbor, Myanmar, also known as Burma. The marginalized Chin, Kachin and Karen in Myanmar have a large and strong Christian presence, among them Baptists, going back to the time of Adoniram and Ann Judson, American Baptist missioners in the first half of the 19th century. The Myanmar Baptist Convention has more than one million members, nearly doubling its membership over the past two decades.
The Brazilian Baptist Convention, which grew exponentially in the previous 20 years, started reaching out to a socially marginalized group – drug addicts. Drug addiction has become a major concern in Brazil. The country’s large cities such as Sao Paolo have areas so affected by drug addiction they are dubbed “Crack Land.” Brazilian Baptists initiated ministries and programs that reach out to addicts in these drug infested areas and have baptized more than 1,000 such persons and have a 200-plus choir comprising these new Christians.

Central to evangelizing marginalized groups, it appears, is meeting their social needs. Because they are often neglected by governments or do not benefit from government programs, marginalized groups tend to be open to the gospel when social needs such as education, healthcare and rehabilitation services are provided by Christians and churches.

Youth Engagement

A program that recruits youth and young adults for mission work contributed to growth among Baptists in Brazil. The program has since been adopted in other parts of Latin America, with the blessings of the Union of Baptists in Latin America (UBLA), one of six regional fellowships of the BWA.

The UBLA program, dubbed Radical Latino and Youth Without Borders, recruits volunteers between 17 and 33 years old to serve a period of several months up to two years. These recruits help to plant churches and work with existing congregations that are deemed “weak” and which need additional support. They also engage in literacy classes, sports evangelism, community service, offer support to nursing homes and provide care to children. They work in schools and universities, big cities, smaller communities and in the streets.

During each cycle, which runs from January to October each year, the young people pass through seven stages, starting with registration and ending with evaluation and a formal closure. In between, the youth receive training in cross-cultural mission, cultural adaptation and supervised practical training. During that cycle, they may experience more than one placement. They meet at scheduled times to share experiences.

Miracles, Dreams and Visions

Strong anecdotal evidence out of South India, East Africa and elsewhere suggests that miracles, especially those of divine healing, are a powerful witness to evangelizing persons. Deep impressions are made in instances when there is no previously known cure, or where all attempts at a cure fail.

Strong anecdotal evidence also suggests that dreams and visions are especially powerful, particularly among persons of other faith traditions such as Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. There are ample testimonies of persons from South Asia, such as India and Nepal, who have come to faith because of a vision or dream that they had.

Christian Lifestyle

Christian lifestyles are a major contributor to church growth, particularly when such lifestyles differ sharply from what normally or previously prevail and are expressed through hospitality, compassion, reconciliation and peace making. In cultures where welcoming someone outside of one’s circle is frowned on, discouraged or not practiced, Christian hospitality is known to make a difference, especially among those who are at the margins of their own society or community, or who are rejected by their family or social group due to some taboo such as a physical disability, illness or disfavored association.

Christian hospitality among immigrants in urban areas, especially in cities with a large migrant population such as Lagos in Nigeria and Shanghai in China, whether from rural communities within the same nation or from another country, has been known to lead to exponential church growth. Most migrants, being strangers in a strange land, have no roots or social connections in the city and will respond readily to a group that extends welcome and support.

In religions and cultures where vengeance is an acceptable response to offence, which often leads to cycles of fighting and conflicts, forgiveness, reconciliation and peacemaking have endeared the Christian faith among both perpetrators and victims, and have been known to change entire communities.

There are other approaches to evangelism and church life, such as vibrancy of worship, which attract others to the Christian faith. Those mentioned in this article have proven effective in the contexts described and may prove helpful and effective in other contexts as well.
European Seminary Makes Bold Changes

IBTS Centre, the successor to the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS), is at an advanced stage of its newest iteration.

Founded in 1949 in Switzerland, IBTS was relocated to Prague, Czech Republic, in 1997 and was re-focused to concentrate on higher degrees for seminary teachers and Baptist leaders. These degrees were validated by the University of Wales (UW) and the Czech Ministry of Education. In 2008, IBTS began a PhD program through UW.

The latest set of changes was made after the global financial downturn of the past few years adversely affected the seminary’s income. The increasing financial burden of the upkeep of a large suite of buildings in Prague led to a severe financial crisis for IBTS from 2008 onwards. In addition, internal problems at the UW led to a severing of the relationship between the two institutions.

In 2012 the European Baptist Federation Council accepted a proposal to move the school to Amsterdam, Netherlands, and to sell the property in Prague. The new entity, renamed IBTS Centre, has entered into formal arrangements with Free University (VU) in Amsterdam to grant research PhD degrees.

Founded in 1880, VU is one of two large publicly funded research universities in Amsterdam. Formerly a small Protestant institution, VU was transformed into a broad, research-intensive university of approximately 24,500 registered students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

IBTS Centre Rector Stuart Blythe, Vice Rector Parush Parushev and Dean of Research Toivo Pilii explain the benefits of going in the present direction. IBTS, they said, had always, from its days in Switzerland, committed itself to a “research degree program that is accredited by legitimate accrediting institutions.” VU meets that criterion.

Amsterdam, being a much more multicultural city, also has advantages that Prague did not. Because English is the main lingua franca of the center, it benefits from being in a major European city where English is a common second language. This was not the case in Prague where English is not as widely spoken. At VU, instructions and classes are also conducted using English.

The multicultural background of VU and IBTS Centre students adds to the richness of the program. Current IBTS Centre students are from countries such as India, Ghana, Croatia, Australia and Cuba.

The center’s leaders stress that, even though the Faculty of Theology at VU includes various Christian traditions, Baptists are able to maintain their own distinctiveness. “Free University brings together various theological traditions and we are experiencing the benefits of this dialogue between the various traditions,” the IBTS Centre leaders said. However, “IBTS is developing its own research culture and teaching.”

While the university and its theological faculty expect Baptists to be conversation partners, “They expect us to be Baptists. You do not leave your faith or tradition when you enter the door of the university. You contribute to the whole but you are allowed to do theology implicitly and explicitly from a Baptist position and perspective. That is very healthy.”

An important part of the new arrangement is the relationship with Dutch Baptists. In Prague, the school and its students had little impact on the local culture, including Baptist life. “Prague was more like an island,” they said. The close relationship with Dutch Baptists includes the sharing of resources such as property, and collaboration at various levels and in different ways.

Affordability is also a major reason for the move to VU and Amsterdam. Even though Amsterdam is known to be a relatively expensive city, many students who enroll at VU do not pay tuition due to the special arrangements that VU and other similar schools have with respective governments in continental Europe. Fees that students pay are mostly to help meet the expenses of the IBTS Centre.

Pursuing a research degree means that students can do much of their research and writing in their home country as the program does not require full time residency in Amsterdam. In addition, IBTS Centre students can use the VU’s extensive library.

But while there are benefits, there are also challenges, one of which is finding affordable accommodation in Amsterdam. But this, they claimed, is balanced out by the student not paying tuition to VU and doing much of the research and writing from one’s home country.

Another challenge is in assisting students to conform to a continental approach of doing research that may be different from that of their home country. In much of Europe, each professor develops a research project and students are expected to fit into this area of research. This is unlike other contexts, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, where students choose their own research project.

It is in this that the help of IBTS Centre is most crucial. IBTS Centre processes applications, helps the prospective student prepare the research proposal and walks the applicant through the process of identifying a professor at VU as supervisor. In addition to the VU professor, IBTS Centre names its own supervisor that works with the student throughout the period of study.
The Union of Baptist Churches (UBC) in the Netherlands was founded in 1881 with seven churches. Today it reports about 80 churches with approximately 11,000 members.

Although most Baptists trace their history to the establishment of the first Baptist church in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in 1609, the Baptist faith did not take root in the Western European country until the mid-1800s. British exiles who founded the first church returned to Britain, while those who remained in the Netherlands became Mennonites.

Baptist witness in the Netherlands began in earnest in 1845 with the missionary work of Julius Kobner, an assistant to Johann Oncken, who pioneered Baptist missionary work in continental Europe. Oncken, a German, has been variously described as the “Father of Continental Baptists,” the “Father of German Baptists” and the “Apostle of European Baptists.”

Dutch Baptists have strong Reformed roots. Of the first seven Dutch Baptists that were baptized, one was a former Reformed pastor. Others who became Baptists were from a Reformed background and tradition. These early and subsequent Baptists were careful to emphasize their Baptist distinctiveness in their understanding and practice of believers’ baptism and baptism by immersion. Some earlier Dutch Baptists were also dispensationalists and were isolationist in their relationships with others.

Dutch Baptist witness has been influenced by the geography of the country. “We are divided by geography, rivers from Germany and Austria,” explained Albrecht Boerrigter, general secretary of UBC. “The north is Calvinistic and the south is Catholic. Baptist mission is mainly in the middle and the north,” Boerrigter said. The middle of the country is referred to as the Bible belt largely because of a strong Reformed presence. “The characteristics in the middle of the country are different from the north because of this Reformed background,” said Boerrigter.

In more recent times, Baptists have begun to spread to other parts of the country, partly due to economics. As coal mines opened up in the south, northerners, including Baptists, migrated there, seeking employment, taking their faith with them, resulting in the establishment of new Baptist congregations.

Current Dutch Baptists see themselves as part of a worldwide missional movement. “The whole character of mission for Baptists is changing. In the 50s there was a Great Awakening where a lot of people came to faith. These people formed the churches,” said Boerrigter. These persons, now 70-90 years old, form a significant portion of the membership among Dutch Baptists. Persons over

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65 comprise 25 percent of church membership, a figure expected to rise by another 10 percent in the next 15 years.

UBC is exploring ways to take advantage of this reality for missional purposes. “You can see it as a threat or an opportunity to witness,” Boerrigter stated. They are seeking ways to enable the generations to share together in a healthy way that not only bridges the generational gap, but that leads to growth.

There is also focus on church planting. In 2013, five graduates from the Baptist Theological Seminary of the Netherlands chose to become church planters in urban communities rather than to become pastors of established congregations. Newer and younger Christians sometimes choose to live in urban neighborhoods to start new Christian communities, explained Hans Riphagen, director of mission for the Dutch Baptist union. “We have within our union a team of people who think about missional church development, how to help churches move in a missional direction.” He said there are “very promising initiatives being taken by existing churches and new church plants, fresh expressions of what it means to be church.”

The presence of immigrants from countries such as Myanmar, a nation that has a strong Baptist presence among certain ethnic groups, has led to growth and diversity of membership within Dutch Baptist congregations. An estimated half a million Christian migrants have entered the Netherlands in recent years.

The integration and participation of these immigrants is one of the challenges currently faced by the churches and the union. Boerrigter made reference to the famous quote popularized by Martin Luther King Jr. about churches in the United States, “Eleven o’clock on Sunday morning [is still] . . . the most segregated hour in this nation.”

Other challenges include ministry in a pluralistic, relativist and secularized society, according to Riphagen. “The Netherlands is secularizing rapidly, Riphagen said. “Churches have to find their voices again.”

He explained that Dutch Baptist churches need to change focus from being inward looking to opening up more. “When you are very much inwardly focused you have strong convictions on how the world is but when you start opening up you see the world has different convictions and there is a lot outside going on. We are going through the process of relearning what the Gospel means in a plural society.”

The secularization started in the 1970s when, according to Riphagen, the belief began to take hold that there was no place for the church, and religion generally, in the big cities. But though secularization is still problematic, things are starting to change. “Nowadays religion is popping up everywhere. It has changed. It is much more fragmented.”

This new fragmentation has led to the loosening of ties to denominations. “Young people today won’t see being Baptist as something important as much as being Christian,” Riphagen indicated. “Authority is not in denomination or even in a church. It is much more subjective.”
The 21st Baptist World Congress will take place in Durban, South Africa, as planned from July 22-26, 2015. The meeting will be preceded by the Baptist Women’s Leadership Conference in Johannesburg, July 18-21, 2015.

This decision was arrived at after the Baptist World Alliance leadership conducted a broad canvass across the worldwide Baptist family. The need to review the scheduled date of the 2015 congress was based on a number of factors. The first was the damage being done by the Ebola virus especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea and the need to intensify our focus to aid the affected persons and communities that face the fury of Ebola.

Another concern was the fear that is being manifested in some parts of the world as people consider the risks involved in travel to sections of the African continent today. Yet another concern was the fact that many persons already hold hotel reservations and are finalizing flight arrangements for their participation in the congress. These persons needed to know whether to proceed with their plans. In addition, while congress registration currently remains at accustomed levels, we are now approaching the period when persons planning to attend the congress are completing binding arrangements.

We are grateful to the BWA regional secretaries and other leaders across the BWA family for their counsel in our deliberations. We are also indebted to Baptist leaders in Africa in (Continued on next page)

Speakers for International Baptist Congress Confirmed

The keynote speakers for the 21st Baptist World Congress to be held in Durban, South Africa, from July 22-26, 2015, have been confirmed.

Peter Chin from South Korea

Ndichafah is a vice president of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance and was, from 2008-2012, general secretary of the Cameroon Baptist Convention. He was previously field pastor for the Yaounde Area in Cameroon. Ndichafah is a member of the BWA Commission on Baptist Worship and Spirituality.

Donald Ndichafah from Cameroon

Oprenova is a vice president-elect of the BWA, is associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Sofia, president of the Bulgarian Baptist Women’s Department and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Baptist Women’s Union. She has been engaged in ministry among women, children and youth. She earned degrees from Spurgeon’s College in the United Kingdom and the International Baptist Theological Seminary.
general, and South Africa in particular, for their prayerful and informed advice. The Baptist Convention of South Africa cancelled its 2015 assembly in order to assist their members to participate in the congress. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa rescheduled its 2015 assembly and chose its location in order to strengthen their members’ capacity to attend the congress. The leaders of the Baptist Mission of South Africa and the Baptist Association of South Africa argued strongly for the congress to not be postponed, their program for 2015 being focused around the congress.

South African Baptist conventions and unions are breathing a sigh of relief.

The same is the case with the leaders of the BWA Women’s Department. They expressed unwavering support for the decision to reaffirm the scheduled congress and are pleased that BWA’s decision is not endangering the convening of the Women’s Leadership Conference.

The decision to adhere to the schedule for the 21st congress represents an effort to express our solidarity with the Baptist community in Africa. It is also a sign of our faith in the power of the sovereign God with whose help the tide of destruction in the three named countries in Western Africa can be turned back. We look forward to the day when, like South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea will be Ebola free.

As the current quinquennium draws near its close, we continue to seek to walk in step with the Spirit. For this reason, BWA continues its drive to facilitate a comprehensive response to the Ebola crisis. We have participated in, and convened, discussions by aid and development agencies to foster effective collaboration and management of the response to the Ebola crisis. We continue to channel funds to the affected countries to help meet the need of the families and communities affected by the current Ebola outbreak. We are supporting educational programs promoting Ebola prevention and we have entered into strategic partnerships that have led to three shipments of food, medical equipment and supplies to the Ebola affected countries. With your help, we can do more.

Let us all commit to fervent prayer for divine intervention to end the current Ebola outbreak. Let us also continue our preparation for what will be an unforgettable congress, the first to be held in Africa, marking strong BWA solidarity with the people of that vast continent.

— Neville Callam, General Secretary, Baptist World Alliance

**Congress Speakers continued**

**Anthony Carroll**
from the Bahamas

Carroll is senior pastor of Antioch Native Baptist Church in Nassau and former president of the Bahamas National Baptist Missionary and Education Convention. He is a graduate of the American Baptist College and Emory University's Candler School of Theology in the US. Carroll is a member of the BWA General Council and the Commission on Evangelism.

**Joel Gregory**
from the United States

Gregory is professor of preaching at Baylor University’s Truett Seminary in Texas. He is founder and principal of Joel Gregory Ministries, an international ministry of teaching and preaching. He earned degrees at Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary where he taught preaching for three years. He is lead author of the recently published, *Baptist Preaching: A Global Anthology*, which was launched during the BWA Annual Gathering in Izmir, Turkey, in July 2014. He is a member of the BWA Commission on Baptist Worship and Spirituality.

**Luiz Soares Silvado**
from Brazil

Silvado is pastor of Bacacheri Baptist Church in Curitiba, Paraná, president of the Brazilian Baptist Convention and a vice president-elect of the BWA. He holds degrees from the Federal University of Paraná, the South Brazil Baptist Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the US. Silvado is a member of the BWA General Council and the Mission, Evangelism and Theological Reflection Advisory Committee.
The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) has prepared a **Green Plan** to guide its environmental practices before and during the 21st Baptist World Congress to be held in Durban, South Africa, from July 22-26, 2015.

In a July 2012 resolution passed by the BWA General Council in Santiago, Chile, the BWA was encouraged “to develop an equitable plan to offset the carbon footprint of the Annual Gathering and to recommend ways to reduce the carbon footprint of all Baptist World Alliance business meetings.”

Also, the international umbrella organization for Baptists aims to adhere to the standards outlined in the *Green Event Guideline: Hosting Green Events in Durban*, in order to integrate sustainability practices before, during and after the congress. These include waste minimization, environmental efficiency, water conservation, social development and local economic development.

Main elements of the BWA plan include recycling, transportation and digital technology.

Name badges and lanyards (the rope or cord that comes with the name badge) issued during the congress will be collected at the end of the event and recycled. At the conclusion of the congress, receptacles will be provided for those who wish to recycle the thousands of program and report books that are being produced for the event.

Monetary and environmental costs of shipping will be reduced by the BWA by printing most of the congress materials, including the program and report books, as well as brochures, in South Africa. Transportation such as shipping by air or sea is generally regarded as one of the biggest causes of carbon emissions.

The BWA is exploring the possibility of providing bicycles as an alternative mode of transportation for conference participants to use from the venue to their accommodations.

The chief means of registration for the South African meetings is online through the BWA website at www.bwanet.org/congress. This results in reducing the use of paper and mailing. The program and report books will be available digitally in eBook and pdf formats in an attempt to reduce the number of printed copies.

The BWA is forgoing the printing of a daily newspaper as has been the custom in past congresses and will instead rely more heavily on the use of social media and electronic press releases to provide updates and inform participants attending the meetings. There will be simultaneous updates on the BWA Twitter account using #BaptistCongress15 as well as posting to its Facebook group page.

Persons are encouraged to start following the BWA Twitter handle @TheBWA and to utilize the hashtag #BaptistCongress15 when they share their own plans for the congress.

In addition, the BWA will take advantage of opportunities offered by the convention center, such as the use of biodegradable cutlery and food containers in its dining areas; move away from using tablecloths; and using tap water-filled jugs and water dispensers instead of bottled water.
In 1886, the Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk, an association of Dutch-speaking Baptist churches, was formed in Orange Free State. The Coloured Baptist Association, churches comprising members of mixed race, was founded in 1888.

Baptists were involved in mission to the Xhosa nation in the early days of the European settlement, and later to all the indigenous groups that called South Africa their home. American missionaries began work among African populations in Transkei, Natal, Transvaal and the Orange Free State in the late 19th century, beginning an indigenous mission in 1892.

The first Seventh Day Baptist church in South Africa was formed in 1906.

ETHNIC & THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Some early church services were integrated racially, but language and cultural differences were hard to overcome and to this day language and culture keep Baptists from worshipping together on Sundays, especially in rural areas and small towns.

In the past decade and a half Baptists of all races are worshipping together in some city churches, in annual gatherings of assemblies and convention meetings, as well as training seminars.

The doctrinal divisions have centered on the Calvinist or Arminian emphases in theology. The first such division occurred in 1857 in Grahamstown when the “Mother Church” divided into two separate congregations over the issue. It took 15 years for the two churches to reunite.

Within the member churches of the Baptist bodies in South Africa, some individual churches are Reformed (Calvinistic) in doctrine, yet maintain membership with the Baptist body. There are also some member churches that have a Charismatic emphasis and remain member churches.

CONFLICT

The Baptist Union of Southern Africa was made up of several associations. These were territorial and special associations formed on the basis of cultural, ethnic and language differences.

Racial attitudes and issues played a major role in these divisions. These racial attitudes resulted in a major split in the 1980s when three of the four associations withdrew from the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and became separate Baptist bodies, namely, the Baptist Convention of South Africa, the Baptist Association of South Africa, and the Baptist Mission of South Africa. The fourth group was formed on the basis of a separate language (Afrikaans).

Much suffering resulted because of the division as disputes over property and pensions saw Baptists fighting and turning their backs on each other.

RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation efforts took place over eight years. Some of these efforts were facilitated by the Baptist World Alliance. Other partners such as the Southern Baptist Convention and American Baptist Churches USA were helpful in remaining neutral while assisting to fund and facilitate these meetings together.

After much infighting and heartache, after honest speaking and listening, after years of turmoil and after the Divine intervention of the Holy Spirit, the South African Baptist Alliance was launched in 2001. (See Terry Rae, Reconciliation between Baptists in South Africa in Baptist Faith and Witness Book 3, page 16).

There has been increasing cooperation in evangelism and in mission sending and the exchange of lecturers at theological training colleges.

SOURCES:

William Brackney, Historical Dictionary of the Baptists

Terry Rae, “South African Baptists Strive For Unity,” Baptist World, January/ March 2009

BAPTISTS OF ALL RACES ARE WORSHIPPING TOGETHER
Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam said that Baptists appear to be uncomfortable about giving public recognition to the work of extraordinarily gifted persons among us. He believes that because we have no sanctoral cycle, we do not readily find room for the celebration in our corporate worship life of the stewardship of outstanding Christian witness and service. The sanctoral cycle refers to the feast days of the saints commemorated in some Christian traditions.

Callam believes it is time that Baptists “do more to identify from among us some persons who stand out as individuals who are secure in their conviction as Baptists and who understand the continuity between that identity and the wider Christian identity.”

Callam made these remarks in his presentation to Horace Russell at his residence in Philadelphia in the United States, and to Hans Guderian at the Elstal Theological Seminary near Berlin, Germany, of citations to Russell and Guderian that were affirmed during the BWA Annual Gathering in Izmir, Turkey, in July.

The BWA leader said he has requested that the BWA move forward in identifying persons who “exemplify what it means to be a disciple of Christ, a faithful servant whose work contributes to the advancement of the stewardship of the Christian community in its response to the divine mandate given to the church.”

He noted that currently, the only such formal recognition within the BWA are two human rights awards, one given annually and the other given every five years during the Baptist World Congress. He said the need exists for greater recognition to be given to the work of those who are involved in other vital ministries in the church. The examples he gave include persons who “help form character in our institutions that prepare people for ministry today” and “those who significantly influence new departures in the way the church fulfills its mission.”

Callam expressed the need for the BWA to commit to the “greater celebration of the diversity of gifts manifested by those who, in highly effective ways, commend the faith to others.” He explained that this was the motivation behind the recent initiative at the BWA Annual Gathering to recognize Baptists who have given outstanding service.

It led to BWA approval of Callam’s proposal for the appointment of a BWA Awards Committee that will commence operation after the Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa.

Those recognized through Callam’s initiative thus far were Gardner Taylor in 2012, Deotis Roberts and Duke McCall in 2013 and Horace Russell and Hans Guderian in 2014.

Guderian Response

Guderian is a former church pastor in Germany, mission director for the German Baptist union and general secretary of European Baptist Mission. He is a past president of the European Baptist Federation.

He served the BWA on the Executive Committee, the Membership Committee, the Baptist World Aid Committee, the Commission on Baptist Worship and Spirituality, the Commission on Doctrine and Christian Unity, the World Evangelism Strategy Workgroup, the Mission and Evangelism Workgroup, and International Mission Secretaries.

Guderian mentioned the emphases of his life’s work. “I have been focused on God’s mission through the church, especially through the local church,” Guderian said. “Deeply in my heart I am still committed to the integration of Eastern and Western Europe and the process of peace and reconciliation.”

He stated, however, that whatever he did or achieved, was not through his power. “I want to give thanks to God,” he emphasized, “the only one who deserves thanks and recognition and praise.”

He made reference to Psalm 100, declaring that “It is God (Continued on next page)
Recognition of Outstanding Baptists continued

what has made us, who has given us life, gifts, courage, credibility and spiritual awareness. He has called us free from fearfulness and from distortion in ourselves.”

Guderian paid tribute to those who contributed to his life and work and named several past Baptist leaders in Germany and his wife, Astrid. “All that I have been able to achieve is only because of many others who also deserve to be recognized in a similar way,” he said. “I owe a lot to them and good friends in my church and my country.”

Russell Response

Russell is a former seminary president, lecturer and pastor in Jamaica, and is regarded as the authoritative church historian in the Caribbean. He left Jamaica in 1989 to become professor of historical theology and dean of chapel at Palmer Theological Seminary (formerly Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary) near Philadelphia.

He began involvement with the BWA at the Jubilee Congress in London in 1955, giving a Bible study at the Tokyo meetings in 1970. He served on several BWA commissions including the Commission on Baptist Heritage and Identity, the Commission on Baptists against Racism and the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup, and contributed the first chapter in Baptists Together in Christ, 1905-2005.

Russell expressed gratitude for the recognition he received. “All of this would not have happened had it not been for the culture of the Jamaica Baptist Union, which made this possible,” Russell stated. “Whatever I am today, I owe it to the ordinary people of Jamaica, those Baptists who loved us, and still love us, prayed for us, cared for us.”

Russell paid tribute to his parents and early mentors, especially British Baptist missionary Keith Tucker, “a gentleman who gave us a vision of what we could become, who put his own life and money on the line.” It was Tucker, he explained, who ensured that his passage was paid for to study at Oxford University in England in the 1950s. Russell eventually returned to Jamaica with both a masters and a PhD degree from Oxford.

Russell, who has retired, expressed gratitude for the support he received from his wife Beryl, and three children, stating that “being away from home means my wife had to pick up the slack and my children had to forgive me.”

He believes that whatever he has accomplished is all God’s doing. “It is God’s work and God be praised.”

On November 9, 2014, German Baptists celebrated in a special commemorative worship service the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Not only German Baptists but the people of Germany in general marked the occasion with a great festivity in Berlin.

What is the reason that this date is so important for the German Baptists, and even more for the Germans and for the Europeans at large in East and West Germany?

For decades people in Europe lived with the reality of separation, of an iron curtain, dividing families and friends from each other. People in East Germany had to suffer under an autocratic communist regime, limiting freedom and human rights.

In 1989 this all came to a fortunate end. Besides the transformations in the political sphere, prayers in hundreds of churches and the candle lights were signs of hope that brought a change of mood. The communists lost control and the frightening wall of separation broke down.

In 2014, we celebrated this wonderful story of liberation. We did so in thankfulness toward God the ruler of history, with the understanding that this liberation creates an obligation toward the future. Many Germans feel obliged to search for peaceful solutions, avoid violence, calm developing tensions and frictions, and put our trust not so much in military and economic force but in prayers and in our hope toward God.

1989 to become professor of historical theology and dean of chapel at Palmer Theological Seminary (formerly Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary) near Philadelphia.

Front page cover of the January/March 1990 Baptist World magazine on the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.
German Baptists held a moving worship service focused on thanksgiving and praise to God to mark the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, at the Baptist church, Berlin-Weissensee.

Christoph Stiba, general secretary of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany, described the occasion as “a very special day in the history of the German people.” It marks not just the “reunification of our country, but it is a day that also changed the lives of many people.” Freedom in Germany now is regarded as a normal experience. “An entire generation does not know any different. And for this we want to thank God.”

At the same time, however, Stiba said it is important for Germans to remind themselves of what happened 25 years ago, if only to remember those who played leading and active roles in the attainment of the current freedom so that present and future generations can build on that legacy. “I rejoice with you this morning.

German Baptists expressed this obligation as a part of their heritage during the festive celebrations on November 9. “It’s our task today to commit ourselves again and again for peace and freedom, for equity and justice,” said Stefan Stiegler, former rector of the German Baptist Theological Seminary in his sermon during a special service to mark the 25th anniversary celebration. The congregation responded appropriately by taking an offering to aid refugees and other people in need in the Middle East.

Neville Callam, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, who took part in this special celebration, together with Eron Henry, BWA associate director of communications, hit the mark in his words of greeting: “Let today’s celebration remind us of the power of the possible. In the memorable words of William Carey, let today’s celebration remind us of how to expect great things from God and so to attempt great things for God. I greet you all and wish you many more years of fruitful collaboration in which you demonstrate, before the eyes of the world, the undiluted joy of oneness reclaimed and the supreme wonder of the work of reconciliation.”

Hans Guderian, from Germany, is a former member of the BWA General Council and a past president of the European Baptist Federation

Above: BWA General Secretary Neville Callam with (from left) Hans Guderian, German Baptist union General Secretary Christoph Stiba and Stefan Stiegler, preacher at the 25th anniversary worship service in Berlin.

Right: Candle lighting ceremony during the worship service to mark the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Below: Members of an East German Baptist youth choir that last sang together in 1989, singing at the 25th anniversary worship service in Berlin in November 2014.

Bottom right: Stephan Stigler preaching at the worship service in Berlin.

(Continued on next page)
that we can celebrate together,” said the German Baptist leader. “We want to ask for God’s blessing in the freedom He has given to us.”

Stiba and other speakers in the worship service compared the fall of the wall to the Jewish exodus experience. The challenge, Stiba said, “is to live into the freedom and not leave this Promised Land.” Stefan Stiegler, former rector of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Elstal who preached the 25th anniversary sermon, admitted that it was a risk to compare the German experience with that of the Jews during the exodus, but he indicated that East Germans lived under repressive communist rule for roughly 40 years.

There was, Stiegler said, 40 years of wandering in the wilderness on the one hand and 40 years of socialism on the other. Germans have experienced freedom of the mind. There was great rejoicing in the freedom experienced by the Jews, and Germans also experienced great joy at the fall of the wall and the reunification of Berlin and the entire country. Present day Germans, Stiegler maintained, have the task “to advocate for freedom and justice.”

Manfred Sult, president of the Baptist Union of East Germany in 1989, told the congregation how the two Baptist unions in West and East Germany came to be one. Even during the time when the country was divided, the two unions did their best to be in touch with each other. Sult said maintaining this contact was difficult due to the difficulties faced by persons crossing from one side to the other.

Sult declared that as soon as the country was united, Baptists on both sides were eager to form one union. “We wanted to become one union again as soon as possible.” Several meetings between the executive boards, the youth departments, the mission agencies and other departments were held. A major disappointment, Sult claimed, was the refusal of the Pentecostals, who were part of the union in the east, to join the new entity. “This was painful,” he said.

Members of a youth choir that last sang together in 1989 reunited for the first time in 25 years during the worship service.

Also in attendance were BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, who brought greetings, and Associate Director of Communications Eron Henry.

“The following is the greeting brought by BWA General Secretary Neville Callam at a service to mark the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 2014, at the Baptist Church, Berlin-Weissensee.

“It cannot be done. Never has been; never will be. That will never happen.”

Perhaps, you have heard people express this sentiment at one time or another. Their intention was to convey their certainty that a proposal being put forward was not workable; that a dream being voiced was impractical; that a hope being cultivated was fanciful. It was not capable of fulfillment.

It saddens me that, sometimes, people express this negative sentiment in response to some far-reaching proposal being put forward, some marvelous idea being suggested, within the context of church life. A doubting Thomas responds dismissively: “That can’t be done.” After being associated with the church for a long time, after garnering years of experience as a disciple of Christ, that person certainly knows when idealists spill their wares.

Thirty years ago, some people scoffed at those who anticipated the fall of the Berlin Wall. “East was East and West was West and that was that. Berlin would never be reunited,” they argued.

Then came November 9, 1989! The impossible happened. The Wall that divided people – that shameful monument to separation – came crashing down, proving that East and West could meet and people once forcibly separated from each other could develop new patterns of relationships.

Today, 25 years later, we gather to remember. We assemble to give thanks. We come together to pray. And, today, should we fail to recognize that it is OK to dream and to dream big; that it is OK to drink at the fountain of Spirit-inspired optimism, we would be doing ourselves a great disservice.

When I was growing up in Jamaica, I heard my mother say again and again, “Can’t is a word that is found in the lexicon of cowards who refuse to dream.” Sometimes, she put it more directly. She would say “Can’t is in the dictionary of fools.” This is what she told us; “Don’t ever say, ‘This can’t be done
The Holy Spirit is Central to Mission

The work and witness of the Holy Spirit is central to the mission of the church, declared Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam.

Callam was speaking during American Baptist International Ministries World Mission Conference in Wisconsin in the United States, in July 2014. The conference was part of the 200th anniversary celebration of Baptist mission in the US, beginning with Adoniram and Ann Judson’s trip to Burma in 1814.

Callam referred to a World Council of Churches declaration that states, “The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Mission,” and made the bold claim that “If the church ceases to engage in mission, it ceases to be the church.” The BWA leader asserted that “One great requirement of our times is the renewal of the consciousness of the place and role of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the church.”

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the mission of the church “involves struggle and resistance in the service of justice, peace and reconciliation,” as well as a “readiness to give an account of the hope that we have in Christ.” This, Callam announced, “calls for action toward healing and the wholeness of creation.”

Callam pronounced that “one aspect of the vocation of the Holy Spirit is to facilitate the process whereby the fullness of life, that is God’s gift to the world, is made available to all.” He noted the 2012 Cape Town Agreement of the Lausanne Movement: “Without the witness of the Spirit of Christ, our witness is futile. Without the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, our preaching is in vain. Without the gifts, guidance and power of the Spirit, our mission is mere human effort. And without the fruit of the Spirit, our unattractive lives cannot reflect the beauty of the gospel.”

An example of boldness of mission under the leading of the Holy Spirit was George Liele, who is increasingly being recognized as the first international Baptist missionary. Nearly a decade before William Carey left England for India and 30 years before the Judson’s left the US for Burma, Liele, a former slave, traveled with his family from Savannah, Georgia, in the US, and founded Baptist work on the Caribbean island of Jamaica, beginning in 1783.

“George Liele models for us the way in which the Holy Spirit calls, equips, sends, empowers and sustains those who delight in the service of the Lord and spend their days in deep commitment to the mission of the Triune God.”

Callam said Liele was liberated by the Holy Spirit and “understood the comprehensiveness of Christian mission. He not only formed churches, but led them to establish educational ministries for the formation of the enslaved for responsible living as people made in God’s own image.”

Liele, “Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, labored tirelessly in church and world for the sake of the Gospel,” and, “emboldened by the Holy Spirit, served courageously in a situation in which hostile forces threatened his personal physical security.”

Lobe den Herren, was in mir ist, lobe den Namen. Amen.

Neville Callam
Baptist World Alliance
Berlin, November 9, 2014
The partnership between the Baptist World Alliance and Texas Baptists was praised by BWA General Secretary Neville Callam while speaking at the Hunger Luncheon held during the annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) in Waco, Texas, from November 16-18, 2014.

Former BGCT Executive Directors Charles Wade and Randel Everett and current Executive Director David Hardage were in attendance.

Callam said that over the last 20 years, since Texas Baptists established what is now called the Hunger Offering, the BWA and the BGCT have partnered together in delivering relief and development aid valued at more than US$2 million to thousands of people in countries across the world. Noting that most of the projects had the aim of empowering people to overcome poverty, Callam provided examples from across five of the six BWA regions, explaining how communities had been transformed through the faithfulness in mission that the BWA-BGCT partnership exemplifies.

Callam lauded the way Texas Baptists have acted in solidarity with the oppressed in meeting hunger needs. He declared that God’s people are called into fellowship with Christ and are made for partnership with each other and for service in the world to the glory of God.

The BWA leader drew attention to the state of world hunger, asserting that food is a grace given by God for the care of the body, the comfort of the mind and the healing harmony of community. He said progress has been made over recent years but much more needs to be done. He observed that Texas Baptists were motivated by a broad vision of God’s creation and of the obligation Christians have to fulfill the vocation God in Christ has given to the church.

In his remarks, BGCT Executive Director Hardage celebrated Texas Baptist partnership with the BWA in providing prepackaged meals that were sent to Liberian communities facing the recent Ebola outbreak.

Callam thanked Gus Reyes and Ferrell Foster for the positive ways in which they have contributed to the ongoing vital BWA-BGCT partnership and expressed a wish for many more years of constructive engagement. This, he said, will open a window on the love of God for those who know the depth of human need.

Callam lauds BWA Partnership with Texas Baptists

The Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) Executive Director John Upton has been serving as president of the Baptist World Alliance since July 2010 and will conclude his period of service in July 2015. At the 21st Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa, he will hand over the presidential baton to his successor.

Grateful for what he described as “the resourceful, wise and capable leadership” that Upton has exercised within the BWA, General Secretary Neville Callam expressed thanks to Upton on

Baptist youth leaders in East Asia were encouraged at a conference in Okinawa, Japan, to be missional and to reach out to those outside of the church.

The participants from Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Macau, explored the meaning of a “marketplace” faith – the need to take the church to where the people are. They were encouraged to develop a “resurrection culture” and were challenged to be empowered for “spiritual warfare.”

The almost 60 delegates used the opportunity to get acquainted with each other and their various ministries, and to provide feedback on training and the preparation of future leaders.

Baptist World Alliance Youth Director Emmett Dunn led a dialogue on the state of youth ministry in Asia. Among the concerns expressed were those for churches in Asia to focus on the needs of young people rather than upholding national and church cultures and traditions that may no longer be relevant. It was also felt that pastors and church leaders should have dialogue with youth.

Presenters at the conference, which was held October 23-25, 2014, and was planned by the Asia Pacific Baptist Youth Fellowship, included BWA vice president and president of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation Ross Clifford of Australia, and missiologist Andrew Kim of South Korea.

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A Baptist World Alliance-sponsored evangelism seminar was held in Lyon, France, as a continuation of its focus on French-speaking countries. Previous seminars for French speakers were held in Lagos, Nigeria, in November 2012 for Francophone African countries, and in Haute Limbe, Haiti, in early 2013.
The Baptist World Alliance general secretary has appointed David Goatley to serve on the Reference Group on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (RGPJP), an advisory group to the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Goatley is executive secretary-treasurer of Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention in the United States. He has had a longstanding association with the BWA and currently chairs the BWA Mission, Evangelism and Theological Reflection Advisory Committee. He is also a member of the BWA General Council, the Budget and Finance Committee and the Congress Committee.

RGPJP grew out of the 10th Assembly of the WCC held in Busan, South Korea, from October 30 to November 8, 2013.

The pilgrimage of justice and peace refers to churches, ecumenical bodies, Christians and like-minded groups and persons taking “transforming actions... so that justice will grow and God’s deep peace [will] rest on the world.” Participating churches and groups serve as communities of justice and peace, “healing a world filled with conflict, injustice and pain.”

RGPJP’s mandate includes advising on how churches can take forward the pilgrimage of justice and peace; monitoring the activities of civil society groups involved in the pilgrimage of justice and peace; and promoting cooperation between churches, ecumenical partners and people of goodwill involved in planning, implementing and reporting on activities related to the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

In addition, RGPJP is to contribute to the theological study process on issues related to the pilgrimage of justice and peace and offer advice on further development of the justice and peace initiative.

The Jesus Christ Bread of Life program is a series of international training seminars by the BWA aimed at renewing Baptists’ understanding of the mission of God and to stimulate the desire to bear witness to that mission in each local context.

The Lyon, France meetings, held November 4-6, 2014, included representatives from Belgium and was held as part of the Annual Gathering of Baptist pastors affiliated with the Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches (FEBC) of France. There were 114 registered participants.

Seminar delegates reflected on their own practice and understanding of evangelism; church planting, particularly within a Western European postmodernist context; and reaching out and witnessing to youth.

A Declaration of Lyon was adopted at the conclusion of the meetings and will guide the implementation of insights arising from the evangelism seminar.

Presenters and speakers included BWA Directors Fausto Vasconcelos and Emmett Dunn; European Baptist Federation Mission Coordinator Daniel Trusiewicz; Glyn Hackett, director of development for FEBC; French Baptist pastor Etienne Lhermenault, president of the National Council of Evangelicals of France; Baptist pastor Anniel Hatton, chaplain at the Paris-Orly Airport; and Charles Jones, area director for Europe, the Middle East and Liberia for American Baptist International Ministries.

The FEBC has 128 churches with approximately 7,000 members.

In addition to France, Haiti and Nigeria, other Bread of Life events have been held in Brazil, Paraguay, India and Cambodia.
The Baptist World Alliance has reorganized the way it fulfills its mission through the United Nations (UN). The organization has expanded its partnership with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) to facilitate the coordination of its UN initiatives.

BWA’s and CBF’s main objective is to maximize the potential for advocacy in defense of human rights and justice through the instruments available at the UN. Their partnership has led to the appointment of Earl Marcus Wiggs III as BWA liaison to the UN.

Wiggs, an attorney at law from the US state of Mississippi, has served as chair of the Baptist Joint Committee, based in Washington, DC, and co-chair of the Religious Liberty Council, which has offices in Florida, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Wiggs will supervise BWA UN work. This includes coordination of the contribution of the current BWA appointed representatives at the UN: Darrell Armstrong, Joseph Oniyama, Raimundo Barreto and Phyllis Boozer in New York; Ronald Shane McNary and Christer Daeland in Geneva, Switzerland; and Dietrich Fischer-Dörl in Vienna, Austria. These volunteers play a vital role in BWA’s networking and advocacy through the UN.

Since 1974, the BWA has had Special Consultative Status at the UN through the Economic and Social Council. BWA is also a member of the Conference of NGOs, and enjoys consultative relationship with the UN Committee of Nongovernmental Organizations (CoNGO), an international membership association. The global organization has access to 41 influential NGO committees in New York, Geneva and Vienna.

The international umbrella organization for Baptists is also accredited as an NGO through the UN’s Department of Public Information (DPI), which enables it to participate in briefings and receive announcements from DPI; is a member of the Committee of Religious NGOs; and collaborates with the Ecumenical Working Group that provides a forum for common work on issues of concern to UN representatives of Christian World Communions.

In recent times, the BWA has increasingly engaged the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, presenting alternative human rights reports on particular UN Member States. At Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil in 2012, BWA co-sponsored side events and submitted documents contributing to the focus of the discussions there. Through the BWA Women’s Department, it has actively participated in the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women.

I was invited to represent the Baptist World Alliance as “fraternal delegate” during the extraordinary synod of bishops held by the Catholic Church in the Vatican from October 5-19, 2014.

The synod on “The pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization” has been extraordinary, not only because it was its canonical designation but also because of the liveliness and depth of the debate, the impact in the media and the reactions throughout the world. Also invited alongside 183 synodal fathers (bishops and cardinals) were several experts, including eight fraternal delegates, four Orthodox and one each from the Lutheran, Reformed and Baptist traditions.

During Vatican Council II in the 1960s, non-Catholic Christians who had been invited were only called “observers.” The designation of “fraternal delegates” shows the improvement of the relationships between the Catholic Church and other Christian traditions. It emphasizes the spiritual fellowship that we all try to achieve to echo Jesus’s prayer: “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them” (John 17:23).

During these two weeks I truly have shared in the joy of this spiritual fellowship expressed in the words of the psalmist, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity” (Ps 133)! I met Catholic leaders from all over the world who eagerly sought to share the good news of Jesus Christ to this generation. Although some major differences remain between our denominations (for instance, as far as family
matters are concerned marriage is not a sacrament to us Baptists), it was impressive to see the concern of many Catholic leaders to reach out to the poor, the wounded and the lost sheep.

As I said in the official speech I delivered during the synod, Baptists and Catholics share the same concern “about those who are suffering in our various respective countries; those without a voice, believers or not, who need Christians to be the salt of the earth, to be the hands and the arms and the word of Christ to protect them and proclaim justice.” I quoted our most famous Baptist, Martin Luther King Jr., “The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.”

I thank God for the many opportunities of fellowship and common prayer or reflection during the fortnight. Let me mention some highlights: the sharing about the situation in all sorts of countries like the tragedy faced by Christian families in Syria and Iraq; the despair of African countries hit by Ebola; the growing poverty connected to migration; and the increasing violence and abuse, especially against women and children.

Hearing about the commitment, the doubts and hopes of so many Catholics witnessing in these situations reminds us, Baptists who also face and address these challenges, that we do not stand alone. Unity and effective collaboration between Christians will bring more strength to solve these painful challenges.

I was also touched by the Bible-based preaching I heard every morning from the synodal fathers. I too enjoyed the various conversations at coffee break, even with the Pope himself who was sharing that time with us. During the conversation I had with him, he explicitly invited me to ask our Baptist family to pray for him. This request surely will find echo in the prayers of many Baptists who have made theirs the working documents on which churches around the world are invited to reflect and pray until a next synod is held in October 2015.

Alongside our Catholic brothers and sisters, we too can pray that within our homes and families the Good News of Jesus Christ may be shared; that hope, justice and love may grow; and that, guided by the Holy Spirit, we may find solutions to the challenges we meet, together. We commit ourselves into the hands of our Father “from whom every family takes its name” (Eph 3).

Valerie Duval-Poujol is president of the ecumenical commission of the Protestant Federation of France and teaches biblical exegesis at the Catholic Institute of Paris.
Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in the United States declared “that the Second Vatican Council was the most momentous religious event of the twentieth century — and not only for Catholics.”

George, chair of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Doctrine and Unity, represented the churches in the Reformation tradition when he delivered a lecture at Gregorian University in Rome on November 21, 2014, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism.

Vatican II opened on October 1962 and its fourth session closed in December 1965. It addressed relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world.

George said the great concepts of that Council included “conscience and freedom, especially religious freedom.” Another was the focus on the “scandalous divisions among the people of God.”

Declaring that he spoke “as a Protestant who is also an evangelical and a Baptist,” George stated, “the fact that Christians today are divided — most outrageously at the Table of the Lord — contradicts the prayer of Christ and countermands the church’s missionary task to communicate and display the love of God to all peoples.”

Contending that “the quest for Christian unity and the task of world evangelization are inseparable,” he asserted that the problem of disunity among Christians is even more urgent now than it was in 1964. He claimed there is a “growing divide not only between but within churches on matters related to marriage and family, sexual ethics, bioethics, and religious freedom.”

It is not all hopeless however. The many results of Vatican II included the effort on the part of the Catholic Church to have dialogue with other Christian traditions, including Baptists. Two rounds of dialogue were held between the BWA and the Vatican, from 1984-1988 and 2006-2010. “At Vatican II the Catholic Church entered the ecumenical movement and by doing so transformed it,” George claimed.

This new ecumenical cooperation and openness by Catholics was consistent with earlier cooperation by Protestant churches through the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910, with its theme “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” and the movement for Faith and Order, which held its first world conference at Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927.

“There are many milestones along the way for which we can give thanks and celebrate, including the landmark document, Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (1982), and Pope John Paul II’s great encyclical on ecumenism, Ut Unum Sint (1995).”

Other examples include the 2010 report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ, which addressed the Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists during the Reformation of the sixteenth century. George noted that “In light of this ecumenical study, the Eleventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation took the historic step of asking the Mennonites for forgiveness, expressing compunction — deep regret and sorrow — for violence done against sixteenth-century Anabaptists in the name of Christ.”

George pointed out that Pope Francis, who became Catholic pontiff in March 2013, has taken a number of initiatives that bode well for Christian unity, such as his visit to the Pentecostal Church of the Reconciliation in Caserta, Italy, in July 2014. “His homily there on Christian unity included a plea for forgiveness for ‘those Catholic brothers and sisters’ who in past times had ‘made laws …persecuted, and denounced their Pentecostal brothers.’”

Baptists in Jamaica and the United Kingdom (UK) celebrated 200 years of joint partnership in 2014. The first Baptist missionary from the UK, John Rowe, arrived in Jamaica in 1814 to continue to strengthen the work that had begun in 1783 under George Liele and Moses Baker, former enslaved persons from the United States. Rowe was followed by a succession of British missionaries to the Caribbean country.

Over much of the 200-year period, Jamaican and British Baptists have collaborated to enrich the lives of Jamaicans. Baptists in Jamaica were among the most strident opponents of slavery. Sam Sharpe, who has received the country’s highest honor, the Order of National Hero, led a slave strike in December 1831, which became violent after colonialists in Jamaica retaliated with force. An estimated 600 enslaved persons, including Sharpe, were executed. Almost 150 Baptist enslaved persons, including Sharpe, were executed. Almost 150 Baptist enslaved persons, including Sharpe, were executed. Almost 150 Baptist enslaved persons, including Sharpe, were executed.

Historians contend that the Sam Sharpe Rebellion was the catalyst that broke the back of slavery in much of the British Commonwealth. The British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833.

British missionaries, such as William Knibb, Thomas Burchell
Native Baptist Missionary Association was formed in response to prejudice of British missionaries toward persons of African descent holding pastoral office in Baptist churches on the island. A significant number of Jamaican Baptists who migrated to Britain in the 1960s did not feel welcome in British Baptist churches and left to join churches of other Christian traditions, such as Pentecostals, or formed their own churches. In 2007, 200 years after the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) offered an apology to Jamaican Baptists for the evils of slavery and the slave trade under the British.

JBU General Secretary Karl Johnson said the friendship between Jamaican and British Baptists has withstood the test of time. "Our friendship represents a powerful testimonial of mutuality, collaboration, respect and continuity," Johnson stated. "Like any longstanding partnership there were, and will be, moments of disagreement, misunderstanding and even tension but true friendships are usually robust enough to withstand those threats and today we have much more to celebrate than commiserate about how God has led us over these two centuries."

BUGB General Secretary Lynn Green said there is a "rich relationship that is shared between Jamaican and British Baptists." She described the 200 years as a "significant journey" and expressed hope "that reflecting on this particular story will inspire [persons] to learn and re-learn how to respond to God’s call to us in this generation."

General Director David Kerrigan of the British Baptist mission agency, BMS World Mission, said “It is only with hindsight that the story to which so many lives have contributed to shape and form is discernable."

Several activities were held in Britain in October 2014 to mark the observance, including a special bicentenary worship service, lecture, symposium and various other meetings. A delegation of JBU leaders shared and participated in these events.
Caribbean Baptists hold memorable meeting in Guyana

The General Assembly of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship (CBF) met in Georgetown, Guyana, from November 5-9, 2014. The 35 delegates from 10 countries met under the theme, “In Step with the Spirit – Free At Last,” and participated in both Bible study sessions and decision meetings.

At the opening event, guests included Donald Ramotar, president of Guyana, David Granger, leader of the Opposition and Andrew Morris Grant, chairman of the Guyana Council of Churches, among other members of the Christian, political and civic communities.

Cultural presentations in music, song, dance and poetry enthralled those in attendance.

CBF President William Thompson, who declared the event open, called upon Baptists and the Christian community in general to stand in solidarity with countries affected by the Ebola virus, not only through prayers but with financial resources. In bringing greetings, Guyana President Ramotar lauded Baptists for their interest in the affairs of the poor and urged them to continue holding up the banner of unity.

Guest preacher Victor Caddette, a Trinidadian living and pastoring in the United States and a former CBF president, challenged the more than 750 attendees at the opening session to see life in the Spirit as quality of lifestyle over that of ecstasy and excitement. Using the Lord’s Prayer as the basis of his sermon, Caddette pointed out that God is known not so much by name but by God’s self-revelation and disclosure in the various and varied existential circumstances of a person’s life.

In Bible study, Anslem Warrick, a vice president-elect of the Baptist World Alliance and general secretary of the Baptist Union of Trinidad and Tobago, used the conference theme scripture, Galatians 5:13-25, to encourage delegates and observers to “walk in the Spirit” and to live true to their commitment in the service of God.

Workshop presentations were made by Stanford Simon from Grenada and Julius Casseus from Haiti, the other BWA vice president-elect from the Caribbean, on “Advancing the Mission of Christ through Technology,” and “Crime and Violence – The Role of the Church,” respectively.

On Thursday and Friday evenings the gathering met for evangelistic meetings. The preacher was Jamaican Baptist pastor Franklyn Small. Many came to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Among the major decisions of the General Assembly were the passing of resolutions addressing issues such as pollution, unity, celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, racism and domestic abuse, and reaffirming the Baptist commitment to sharing and living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ in practical ways. The assembly voted to amend its constitution and by-laws to allow the president to succeed him or herself for a second five-year term.

Two new member bodies were accepted into the CBF, the Guyana Missionary Baptist Church and the Evangelical Baptist Mission of South Haiti. A new feature was the launch of the first edition of the Baptist Exclusive, a special General Assembly publication.

The assembly culminated with organized tours to places of historic interest in Guyana on Saturday and on Sunday, and sharing in divine worship services in Baptist churches where some visiting pastors preached.

Caribbean leaders and participants, at the CBF Assembly in Guyana in November, 2014

CHURCHES LEAD reconciliation initiatives in South Sudan

Baptists have joined other Christian groups to help end fighting in South Sudan.

Edward Dima, president of the Baptist Convention of South Sudan, told the Baptist World Alliance that church and community leaders met several times in October with an aim to bring conflicts in the northeastern African country to an end.

Tens of thousands of South Sudanese have been displaced by nine months of civil war in the states of Unity, Jonglei and Upper Nile, and in Juba, the capital. Millions more are refugees in bordering countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan.

The BWA sent an initial sum of US$18,000 to assist in South Sudan IDP (internally displaced persons) relief.

Dima said, “Recently there were border clashes between Moyo in Uganda and Kajokeji in South Sudan which forced about 12,000 displaced people to run to Kajokeji for safety.” The conflict is related to issues of traditional land ownership and the demarcation of the international border between South Sudan and Uganda in that area.

South Sudanese accused residents of Moyo of destroying 90 homes and stealing 37 heads of cattle during a raid in the South Sudanese territory. In retaliation, 12 Ugandan women were kidnapped in Moyo and brought to Kajokeji. In recent clashes at least seven people have been killed.

After the latest outbreak of violence, various Christian traditions convened several meetings of the Reconciliation Church Council. “This council is meeting to work toward common peace as the body of Christ,” Dima, who chairs the council, declared.

The council adopted a resolution acknowledging the work of governments, churches, humanitarian organizations and individuals who helped on both sides of the border during the conflict; called on the governments to resolve the border issues speedily; and encouraged church leaders, governments and local authorities to take steps to reunite alienated and broken families.

The council will organize a series of worship services and meetings to promote reconciliation, healing and forgiveness that will include church leaders, elders,
landlords, chiefs, and youth on both sides of the border. These meetings include a leadership conference planned for December 1-3 in Kajokeji. “Pray with us for support during this sensitive face to face meeting,” Dima requested.

New churches will be planted in conflict communities by the various Christian groups as part of the peace efforts.

An interdenominational committee has been established by the council to oversee the implementation of the resolution.

The outreach efforts have thus far helped to ease tensions in the area. “Thank God that peace and calmness has returned to the two sister districts,” said Dima. “Pray for the continued effort to dialogue with the two communities. Pray for the effort of churches [that] real and permanent peace shall be realized and attained.”

South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan in July 2011, following a referendum. The area has been wracked by longstanding conflict. The First Sudanese Civil War was fought from 1955-1972 between the northern part of Sudan and the southern Sudan region, the latter demanding representation and more regional autonomy.

After the war, which claimed approximately half a million lives, the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region was formed in 1972. This lasted until 1983 when the Second Sudanese Civil War broke out. This war ended in 2005 and led, ultimately, to the splitting off of South Sudan as an independent country. Roughly two million people died as a result of fighting, famine and disease caused by the second war. Four million people in southern Sudan have been displaced at least once during the war.

In December 2013, a political power struggle broke out between the South Sudan president and his former deputy over accusations of a coup plot, which eventually led to a civil war. Up to 10,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the fighting.

“Thank you very much for praying and for the support you have given to the displaced people of South Sudan, especially those people who fled the border conflict between Moyo in Uganda and Kajokeji in South Sudan,” Dima told the BWA.

The Lord has seen us through 2014, we are excited to share with you that peace has returned to the two communities of Madi in Moyo Uganda, and Kuku in Kajokeji, South Sudan. You remembered these communities had a fight and many people were displaced and killed and property were lost.

There was a huge displacement and we thank God that BWA supported us with relief and prayers. You prayed for calm, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation between the two sister communities who have lived together from generation to generation. This cannot be destroyed overnight because of the border.

What actually triggered the fight was the issue of the international border demarcation, and thank God that the government of both countries of Uganda and South Sudan is working on it.

The pictures you see are the Bishops and pastors from all denominations in both Moyo, Uganda and Kajokeji, South Sudan who come up with a recommendation for peace, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing conference which we did on December 1-4, 2014.

The conference drew pastors and church leaders in Moyo, Uganda, and Kajokeji, South Sudan. A total of 136 participants attended and various topics were taught including expositions on peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Many other pastors were involved in moderating the session. Participants broke down and many shed tears as they listened to testimonies from the pastors and church leaders.

There was a confession and repentance done on behalf of the two communities and a moment of grief and sadness was felt. Thank God that the conference ended up successfully, and churches were called to be ambassadors of peace and reconciliation. They were also told to be aware that
IN MEMORIAM

ROLF DAMMANN,
a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance from 1980-1985, died on December 3, in Berlin, Germany. He was 90 years old.

Dammann was general secretary of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) from 1969-1989.

He served in the German navy from 1942-1944, suffered serious injury and was, for a brief period, a prisoner of war. After the war, Dammann worked for East Germany’s Inland Revenue department in various capacities, including as a tax inspector.

He underwent theological training and was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1960. From 1958-1965 he held the part time positions of pastor of Bethel Church of Berlin-Friedrichshain and chairman of East German Baptists, taking on the latter position on a full time basis in 1965.

Dammann was elected the first general secretary of the renamed and reconstituted Union of Evangelical Free Churches in the German Democratic Republic in 1969 until his retirement in 1989. This new body comprised approximately 220 churches with more than 20,000 baptized members. It included Baptists, who were the majority, as well as Brethren and Elim churches.

He welcomed Martin Luther King, Jr. to East Berlin, on the American Civil Rights leader’s visit in 1964; Ralph Abernathy, a close associate of King’s, in 1973; and evangelist Billy Graham, in 1982.

Despite travel restrictions imposed by the communist state, Dammann attended a number of international meetings, including Christian Peace Conferences in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and Baptist World Congresses in Tokyo, Japan, in 1970 and in Toronto, Canada, in 1980.

Dammann was tasked with negotiating the relationship between the church and the communist state of East Germany, during which time he had several meetings with the country’s Secretaries of State for Church Affairs.

In addition to being a BWA vice president, Dammann served on the General Council, the Executive Committee, the Baptist World Aid Committee, the Congress Program Committee and the Commission on Religious Liberty and Human Rights.

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said the BWA “celebrates Dammann’s stewardship as a leader within the Baptist community,” and that “he gave outstanding service.”

Callam noted that, at a meeting in Elstal, Berlin, in 2007, Dammann expressed gratitude to European and global Baptists for their support and encouragement to East German Baptists during the communist era. The BWA had sponsored a number of visits to East Germany. These visits, Callam recalled Dammann saying, “reminded the 20,000 Baptists in the GDR that they were a part of a worldwide Baptist family.”

The funeral service was held on December 18 at St. Peter’s Luis City Cemetery in Berlin.

He and wife, Elfriede, who died in 2003, had five children.

DANIEL MACHADO,
a former president of the Portuguese Baptist Convention (PBC), died on September 15.

Machado was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1959 and served several congregations, including in Queluz, Coimbra and Porto.

While serving as pastor of the Third Baptist Church in Porto, Machado was director of the Portuguese Evangelical Home, a residence for orphans and the elderly founded by his parents.

He was president of the PBC for a decade and, during that time, served as a member of the Baptist World Alliance General Council. He is a former president and professor of Old Testament at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Queluz, Portugal.

Machado earned degrees and diplomas from the seminary in Queluz and the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschlikon, Switzerland, where he met his wife, Eunice.

Funeral services were held September 16 at the Evangelical Baptist Church of Cedofeita in Porto.

He leaves wife, Eunice and sons, Jónatas and Emanuel.

BOOK NOTES


In Can I Get a Witness? Essays, Sermons, & Reflections, Bill Leonard ranges far and wide. His papers deal with subjects ranging from “Perspectives on Denominationalism” to “Who are the Nones?” Other chapters make diverse offerings extending from a sermon on “Jacob Wrestling with Strangers” to a reflection on “Vanishing Mountains.”

As with other Bill Leonard’s books, this one offers helpful insights into how to understand what is happening as the church seeks to respond to perplexing issues marking the changing times in which we live.

Doreen Morrison, Slavery’s Heroes: George Liele and the Ethiopian Baptists of Jamaica, 1783 – 1865, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014

In Slavery’s Heroes: George Liele and the Ethiopian Baptists of Jamaica, 1783 - 1865, Doreen Morrison offers a credible interpretation of an oft-overlooked story. Her thesis and approach are the fruit of fresh research throwing up a host of characters scarcely referenced in past publications dealing with the subject. By locating Liele in his African American roots, Morrison highlights an early phase of the development of African American involvement in international mission that is finally getting the attention it deserves. She also succeeds in giving voice to forgotten heroes and heroines in the Jamaica Baptist story.
According to an old Jewish legend, King David kept his windows open at night. When the breezes would flow through his chamber, the strings on his harp would quiver, making sound. This would get him out of bed to compose a psalm.

I really like that legend about David, in part because it points to the truth that the Psalms really do mysteriously stir something deep within us, but mostly because David couldn’t sleep. The things we read in the Psalms are the very things that keep us up at night. While there are beautiful expressions of trust and wonderful praises in the Psalms, there are also anxieties, troubles, regrets, guilt, confusion, and panic.

I was reminded of this most poignantly in a prayer given by a Liberian pastor whose congregation has suffered illness and death from the Ebola outbreak. He quoted Psalm 13 in his prayer: “How long, oh Lord? Will you forget me forever? Must I bear pain in my soul and sorrow in my heart all day long? Answer me, oh Lord and my God, or I must sleep the sleep of death.”

Do you pray like that? In all honesty, how can we not? We can never have real freedom, or even know the true depth of love, until we have stood in God’s presence and are truthful with our pain. I hugged my friend after the prayer and felt him sob. Yes, we have countless reasons to be thankful and we have countless reasons to bask in the pleasures of so many blessings on our lives but the fact also is true that we grieve, we ache, we struggle, and we worry. We churn with fears and regrets. We are frustrated by our limitations and constrictions. There are seasons in our lives when it all falls apart. Somebody is sick, in trouble, and it is breaking our hearts. The Liberian congregation said that a dark shadow had fallen across their lives. Peace that they once had is now buried under the weight of spiritual and emotional anguish. One brother shared that he had 10 siblings; nine have died due to the outbreak.

Sometimes I wonder if prayer should be a nicer thing. So, we say our thanks. We pray our requests as politely and earnestly as we can. We pray for help here and there. But, we don’t cry out our total brokenness. We don’t spill out our raw hurt. We don’t ask questions, dark questions, that move and bleed within us. Maybe it never occurred to us that such questions and emotions should be poured out into the light. Maybe we hold back because it is the very nature of pain to close us in on ourselves.

There is something in the experience of suffering that is much like the force of a spider spinning around us a thick white numbing web of silence. Pain wants to make us mute. So, we withdraw. We withdraw spiritually, relationally. We tend to shut down. It is the double poison. It is not just the pain but the isolation it wants to impose. Many of our brothers and sisters in Africa are feeling the pain of that isolation.

Jesus said that to enter the Kingdom of God you must become like a child. Whatever else he may have had in mind, there is at least this: children tell the truth about what they feel and what they need. And children will make honest complaints and raise honest questions, which seem to be inseparable from the fact that children are also willing to be held in somebody’s arms.

My Liberian friend ended his prayer with a quote from another Psalm, saying, “Those that go forward weeping, sowing with tears, will come home with shouts of joy.”

I have been challenged. I have been challenged to be more consistently truthful with my questions, regrets, guilt, and anguish. Do we understand that God can be trusted with anything? Abraham Herschel said there are three ascending levels of grief. The first level of grief is tears. The second level is silence. The third level is song.

Our friends in Ebola stricken places are teaching us this. So, let’s tell the truth, trusting God to sort it out, and in time, the right time, to put a new resounding song in our trusting, grateful hearts.
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