Dear Worldwide Baptist Family:

It is with gratitude and joy that we greet you from the Division on Mission, Evangelism & Theological Reflection.

The Baptist World Alliance® held its Annual Gathering in Santiago, Chile, July 02-07, 2012 under the theme of the 2010-2015 Quinquennium In Step with the Spirit; with the subtheme for 2011-2012 being Proclamation through the Spirit.

All seven commission of the METR Division – Baptist Heritage & Identity, Baptist Worship & Spirituality, Christian Ethics, Doctrine & Christian Unity, Evangelism, Ministry, and Theological Education & Leadership Formation - met during the week. Papers were presented with the opportunity for reflection and engagement.

Although all of the papers were a reflection of a geographical region with religious and social context, they also lend themselves to several timeless ideas and suggestions. These thoughts give framework for the Baptist Global family.

You will read a few sample statements drawn from papers presented during the week. No quotation marks or presenter’s name is given. Following each statement you will find “timeless” suggestions or ideas for your consideration.

If you have any further comments, questions, &/or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at: metr@bwanet.org.

It is the hope of the METR Division that these ideas will be the spark that ignites a flame within your local ministries to proclaim the Name of Christ and walk humbly In Step with the Spirit.

Sincerely,

Fausto A. Vasconcelos
Director, Mission, Evangelism & Theological Reflection
Letter to the Churches

Get Involved:

DENTON & JANICE LOTZ HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD 2013

The BWA is currently taking applications for 2013 Baptist World Alliance Denton and Janice Lotz Annual Human Rights; which is intended to recognize and give more visibility to the work of men and women who are doing an outstanding job in defending and promoting human rights as they are defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(Click here to nominate)

BWA HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

The BWA is also making preparations for the observance of BWA Human Rights Day on December 8 and 9, depending on whether churches worship on Saturday or Sunday. This observance emphasizes Janice Lotz Denton and Janice Lotz Annual Human Rights Award for his prominent role in advocating for the rights of the poor and negotiating the peace-making process that brought to an end a civil war in El Salvador, which took approximately 75,000 lives over the course of 12 years.

(Read More)

Peace and Grace be with you!

This letter intends to offer particularly to those who did not have the opportunity to attend the BWA Annual Gathering in Santiago, Chile, last July, a flavor of what happened in the meetings of the five Freedom and Justice Commissions, and some of the events that took place out of them, which can impact the lives of Baptists around the world. I do wish more Baptists around the world can benefit from the rich mosaic of the interesting and productive sessions that were generated from the Freedom & Justice Commissions.

Hopefully, the information shared here will encourage greater consideration of and reflection on important themes in the life of Christian individuals or churches today and will spark ideas on how you and your church can join efforts with the BWA to fulfill our task of being faithful witnesses of God’s Kingdom in the world.

The themes/issues dealt with by the F&J Commissions in Santiago connect with the demands of the overall work of the BWA Division on Freedom and Justice (F&J Division) throughout the year. Resolutions were passed by the General council which resulted from suggestions coming from these commissions. In many ways the reflection done in the F&J commission sessions either generate follow up action, or offer a theological foundation for the day-to-day advocacy work done by the BWA itself and by a number of Baptists around the world.

Furthermore, the planning of these sessions followed the emphasis of the quinquennial BWA Ministry Plan, whose theme for 2011-2012, In Step with the Spirit: Proclamation was interpreted in the work of the F&J Division as “Proclaiming Freedom.” The adoption of this theme coincided with the worldwide celebrations of the 400th anniversary of Thomas Helwys’ book A Short Declaration of the Ministry of Inquity (1612), considered by many scholars the first claim for full religious liberty for all in the English speaking world, which became the focus of the first F&J Roundtable as you can see below.

Our emphasis for the 212-2013 year is on “Liberation.” Plans for the meetings in Kingstown, Jamaica, are underway. I hope to see you there.

Feel free to email us back at fandi@bwanet.org with your questions and thoughts.

Warmest regards,

Raimundo Barreto
Director, Freedom and Justice

http://www.bwanet.org/programs/freedom-and-justice

Thoughts from the Commissions

Religious Freedom

The F&J Commission on Religious Freedom spent time learning about the context of Baptist life and the state of religious freedom in Chile.

A session focusing on the legal lens of liberty addressed the status of religious freedom in other Latin American countries. Minority voices reports were heard about the situation of Baptists and other religious minorities in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. (Read More)

Social & Environmental Justice

This commission held sessions on three important subjects: domestic violence, creation care, and migration. An entire session was dedicated to reflect on environmental issues, including the recent Rio+20 Conference in which the BWA played a role. (Read More)

Peace

This commission focused on Christian ministry for peace and justice in Latin America. An overview of the historical context leading to peace and justice initiatives among Latin American Christian churches highlighted the difficulties faced by many Latin Americans due to the national security state doctrine and the atrocious repression of military governments which devastated the continent in the 1970s and 1980s, producing thousands of disappearances, tortures and relentless persecutions. (Read More)

Roundtable: F&J First

The Freedom and Justice Roundtable was a new initiative that brought together all F&J Commissions to reflect on a common theme: “Thomas Helwys and the Baptist Legacy of Religious Freedom for All.” The papers presented during that meeting can be found at http://www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org/chile.htm

These are some suggestions coming out of those presentations, for Baptists in the 21st century: We must advocate for religious freedom around the world for all persons, not just for those who believe as we do. Our commitment to freedom must include those with whom we disagree. Second, as Baptists we should fight for other human rights that evolve from similar biblical and theological tenets. Third, deeper understanding and greater acceptance of a multi-faith plural society in light of Helwys’example encourage active engagement rather than a withdrawal to the margins, or any attempt to re-establish Christendom by force or law.

We need to reflect on the intersection between the historic Baptist tenet of religious liberty, also called “soul freedom,” and concerns for justice and peace. Among other things, we need to ask ourselves, “How we practice our liberty in a world whose disparity is escalating to unprecedented levels? Do our congregations possess enough soul freedom to stand up and name this an abomination, an assault on human dignity?” As one of the panelists affirmed, quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “freedom is not something you have for yourself, but something you have for others.” Participants were driven attention to the volatile situation of the Middle East, in General, and of Lebanon and Syria in particular, and asked to pray for our brothers and sisters living in such difficult times. The panelists also highlighted how, in many parts of the world, religious identity and political power have become inextricably linked, alerting also against the dangers of mutual misperceptions between different faith communities. “We do not bear false witness to Christ when we bear false witness against our neighbor, however different he or she may be, and however difficult the political and economic conditions in which we are living.”

Among other things, this commission heard the inspirational story of Rev. Edgar Palacios, who was the recipient of the 2012 Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award.