BAPTIST WORLD
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Baptists Making a Difference

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GIFTS FROM GLOBAL BAPTISTS:
STORIES ENGAGING CHURCHES IN CONVERSATION

A podcast from the Division on Mission, Evangelism and Justice (MEJ) of the Baptist World Alliance hosted by MEJ Coordinator Trisha Miller Manarin

This monthly podcast focuses on the work and ministry of member bodies and churches in the BWA. Our goal is to share stories from our Baptist brothers and sisters around the world, encouraging our churches to consider and explore new ministry possibilities.
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SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL CHANGE OFTEN INVOLVES THE CONVERGENCE OF INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS INTERSECTING WITH SOCIETAL DISRUPTION. The Christian movement is in many respects an illustration of this process as Jesus’ life, death and resurrection unfolds in the contours of political upheaval and shifting religious expressions. Or as Paul writes in Galatians 4:4, it was, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.”

“We continue to pray that we might be disciples of faith in that fullness of time and ask that the Lord will allow us to live out his fullness in our time. This Easter we prayed that we might be disciples of faith, love and courage who stand at the crossroads of pain and societal change and point to the hope of Jesus. For just as Esther and Daniel chose conviction in the face of injustice and Paul and Barnabas chose proclamation “where Christ was not known” (Romans 15:20), Easter is a reminder that we are to be individuals fully submitted in word and deed to Jesus Christ.

The following pages feature individuals who have lived with courage and conviction in light of the resurrection. These profiles are a powerful reminder of the clouds of witnesses who surround us and urge us to join with them in following the living Savior. Fortunately, through the years the Baptist movement has been blessed with such individuals.

For example, I was recently in Zurich, Switzerland, working on preparations for our 2018 BWA Annual Gathering. There, on the banks of the Limmat River in one of the oldest sections of the city, a plaque reads:

Here were drowned in the middle of the Limmat River from a fishing platform Felix Manz and five other Anabaptists during the Reformation period between 1527 and 1532. The last, Hans Landis, was executed in Zurich in 1614.

It is a moving experience to stand at that spot and prayerfully reflect on the actions of these early Anabaptist leaders. Manz, who was one of the earliest martyrs of the Radical Reformation, had his hands and feet bound and met his earthly end while singing, “Into thine hands I commit my spirit.” His mother is reported to have stood on the banks of the river and yelled to him to remain steadfast in his faith. Manz’s death occurred in the same year Anabaptist leaders in Switzerland penned the Schleitheim Confession calling for believers baptism and the renunciation of all violence.

Zurich is filled with many leaders of the Christian faith who, during the time of the Reformation, sought to live in the light of the teachings of Scripture. Perhaps the most well known is Huldrych Zwingli who helped translate the Zurich Bible, the first complete translation of the Bible into the German language, some five years before Martin Luther’s Wittenberg Bible. Zwingli, after Martin Luther and John Calvin, is sometimes called “the Third Man of the Reformation.”

The stories and ethos of these individuals will infuse this year’s BWA Annual Gathering that meets in Zurich, July 2-7. If you have not yet made plans to be present, please do so today at www.bwanet.org. In addition to hearing biblical reflections from around the world, attending breakout sessions on critical issues of concern today and engaging in the business of the BWA, this year’s meeting will have some important moments. To name just a few, on Sunday morning we will travel together to a cave just north of Zurich for a time of joint meditation in the very place where early Anabaptists fled and hid during times of persecution. On Tuesday we will worship in the historic Grossmunster Church in collaboration with the Swiss Reformed Church and the Swiss Baptist Union in song, prayer and commemoration. On Thursday, there will be a unique forum to discuss with the Swiss Reformed Church the realities impacting people of faith who face persecution in many places in the world.

From location to theme to unique opportunities, this is an Annual Gathering that will seek to connect each of us to the Lord and to each other – a dynamic heritage and an ongoing call to live as individuals whose yielded lives pursue Kingdom impact.

“This Easter we prayed that we might be disciples of faith, love and courage who stand at the crossroads of pain and societal change and point to the hope of Jesus.”

– ELIJAH BROWN
THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE made important decisions and accepted several recommendations at its meetings in early March.

General Secretary Elijah Brown recommended and the Executive Committee unanimously affirmed that his immediate predecessor, Neville Callam, be named General Secretary Emeritus. The proposal is to be formally voted on by the General Council at its meeting in Zurich, Switzerland, in July.

Callam retired as BWA General Secretary in December after serving the organization for 10 years. He will share the honorific title with Denton Lotz, BWA General Secretary for 19 years, from 1988 to 2007.

Vesekhoyi Tetseo, elected General Secretary of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation in September 2017; and Jeremy Bell, elected General Secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship in January, were formally ratified as BWA regional secretary for Asia Pacific and North America, respectively.

The St. Vincent and the Grenadines Baptist Convention in the Caribbean was recommended to be received as the newest BWA member organization during the Annual Gathering of the global organization in Zurich.

The Executive Committee received the recommendation that Christer Daelander of Sweden, a BWA representative to the United Nations and religious freedom representative of the European Baptist Federation, receive the 2018 Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award. The presentation will be made in Zurich in July.

An Evangelism Award continued to be developed that will be made to a Baptist congregation. Sponsored by the Kowloon International Baptist Church in Hong Kong, the award is being capitalized at US$250,000 and is to be awarded every five years, beginning in 2020.

A Baptist Forum for Aid and Development was created to work closely with both the director of Baptist World Aid (BWAid) and the BWAid Committee. Convened by the BWAid director, the forum will function as a space for collaboration and consultation between aid and development professionals and practitioners.

Brown announced he is in the process of creating a General Secretary Global Leadership Council comprising eminent Baptist leaders of repute who will act as advisors to the General Secretary. Inaugural members of this council are former BWA Presidents Billy Kim of South Korea and David Coffey of the United Kingdom.

The Baptist leaders and representatives from 25 countries, who met in Falls Church, Virginia, in the United States, paid tribute to late American evangelist, Billy Graham.

Graham was lauded for his impact on Baptist life and Christian witness on a global level. In addition to speaking at every Baptist World Congress from 1955 to 1990, Graham collaborated with Baptists and other Christian groups in various countries in his evangelistic campaigns that spanned more than five decades.

Among those attending his funeral service on March 4 in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the United States, were BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown, General Secretary Emeritus Denton Lotz and former Presidents Billy Kim and John Upton.

Those present at the Executive Committee meeting wrote letters of solidarity and support to Baptists in Syria who have suffered much from the ongoing civil war and conflicts in the Middle Eastern country.

“I am grateful for the men and women who provide outstanding leadership to Baptists around the world. They are at the forefront of Baptist life and witness and have given great support to the work and ministry of the BWA. I am thankful for their attendance and support at my first Executive Committee meeting as BWA General Secretary.”

— ELIJAH BROWN
NEW BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE GENERAL SECRETARY ELIJAH BROWN emphasized the uniqueness of the global umbrella organization for Baptists.

“There is not another Baptist organization that is as united in diversity and expressive of God’s Kingdom,” he told a group of Baptist leaders and representatives from 25 countries attending BWA Executive Committee meetings in early March.

Brown gave, as an example, the 2017 Annual Gathering in Bangkok, Thailand, where almost 300 persons from 50 countries attended. He said that, for many global organizations, “it would be a significant milestone to draw leaders from 50 different countries.”

He shared his joy at being part of this global movement. “I wake up every day grateful and humbled and excited to be part – with you – of this incredible, diverse family seeking impact for the glory of Jesus Christ.”

Brown recounted the achievements of the BWA over the previous year, commending his predecessor, Neville Callam, for his stewardship and leadership.

In 2017, 43 development grants totaling just under US$400,000 were given to 30 countries, having an impact on 6,000 persons. “Efforts have included emergency shelter, refugee assistance, hunger and water relief, agriculture development, natural disaster responses and education,” Brown told the meeting at the BWA offices in Falls Church, Virginia, in the United States.

He highlighted an agricultural project in the Central African Republic (CAR), a water well project in Chinnanallaballi, Andhra Pradesh, India and assistance to Syrian refugees.

“The average grant was about US$9,300,” Brown declared. “An ongoing priority will be giving meaningful grants to churches and member bodies that can implement a project to meet a real need while enhancing their missional witness to the community.”

The Baptist Fund for World Evangelization and Discipleship (BFWED) made significant contributions to mission and evangelism. BFWED helped to plant 10 new churches in the CAR, reaching approximately 4,200 Pygmies. In Nepal, 35,000 evangelism tracts were printed and distributed by Baptists to five previously unreached villages.

The BWA leader lauded ongoing dialogue the BWA has with other Christian traditions. Jamaica hosted the fourth of five Baptist-Methodist dialogues, bringing together 11 representatives from 10 countries. In December, the first meeting in the third round of Baptist-Catholic dialogues was held at Baylor University, Texas, in the United States. Nineteen theologians from nine countries participated. The first round of Baptist-Catholic dialogue occurred 1984-1988 and the second round from 2006-2010.

The BWA continued its presence at the United Nations, accrediting eight persons; representation was made to governments in countries where religious freedom violations occurred; recognition and support were given to persons engaged in freedom and justice; and Baptists were encouraged to take actions and make their voices heard on global issues of religious freedom concerns.

“This is your BWA at work,” Brown told the Baptist leaders. “Sixty-four countries were directly touched by the BWA in 2017 through pastoral visits, BWAid assistance and direct mobilization of Baptist leaders for international engagement.”

“I wake up every day grateful and humbled and excited to be part – with you – of this incredible, diverse family seeking impact for the glory of Jesus Christ.” – ELIJAH BROWN
JEWISH RABBI COMMENDS BAPTIST CONTRIBUTION TO FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

Institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were founded on baptist ideas.

These observations were made by David Saperstein, a rabbi and former Ambassador-at-Large of the United States for International Religious Freedom. Saperstein was speaking at the Baptist World Alliance General Secretary’s Dinner in Arlington, Virginia, United States, on March 6.

“People of faith played an important role in creating the UN and [various] declarations of human rights,” Saperstein told the several hundred gathered at the Sheraton Hotel in Arlington, close to Washington, DC.

Saperstein asserted that Jews and Baptists have similar understandings and approaches to religious freedom. “There cannot be other freedoms if there is no freedom of conscience,” he told the gathering. “Repressive regimes that do crackdowns also do so against religion.”

He noted that Baptists such as Harold Stassen, former governor of Minnesota in the United States, played leading roles in conceiving the charter that created the United Nations. Others, including J.M. Dawson and James Wood, helped reinforce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in December 1948.

The Jewish rabbi said Baptists such as Roger Williams, who founded the American state of Rhode Island, were forerunners of contemporary advocates of religious freedom. “Baptists gave the gift of religious freedom to the modern world,” he said.

He said Article 18 of the declaration is of significance to people of faith. The article states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Saperstein said, “interfaith cooperation is now unprecedented in human history” and “many countries do not have serious religious freedom issues.” However, those that do, such as China, India and Nigeria, have large populations. “Many people face challenges to their faith and beliefs.” Countries enact “apostasy laws that make religious freedom impossible.”

Blasphemy laws are a problem in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other countries. Christians, including Baptists, suffer from state actions and restrictions in Somalia, Eritrea and elsewhere. Nonstate actors such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Al Shabab in East Africa and Boko Haram in Nigeria, engage in widespread persecution of Christians.

Saperstein appealed to Baptists to become moral guides at the global level to counter erosions of religious freedom. “In many countries it is Baptists who are suffering,” The freedom Baptists advocate to meet and organize “are frightening to some governments and some other religions,” he declared.

Saperstein commended Elijah Brown on his appointment as BWA General Secretary. “Elijah is one of the most knowledgeable people on how religion drives both violence and peacemaking,” he said of Brown, who took office on January 1.

A video on the BWA was shown at the dinner. It was produced and sponsored by ethicsdaily.com, a division of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville in the US.

Participants at the dinner included Baptists from Virginia; Maryland; Washington, DC; and elsewhere in the US, as well as Baptist leaders and representatives from 25 countries who attended the Executive Committee and other meetings of the BWA from March 4-7.
In Early March, the Baptist World Alliance RENOVATED THE SECOND FLOOR OF ITS OFFICES in Falls Church, Virginia, in the United States, in partnership with Dallas Baptist University (DBU).

The gift in kind resulted from a visit made to the school by BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown in January. DBU President Adam Wright made the commitment as a gesture of the historical bond between both institutions.

“Improvements to the building will enhance our capacity to pursue the mission of the BWA to network the Baptist family to impact the world for Christ,” Brown said. “I am grateful to DBU and, in particular, to President Adam Wright and to members of the DBU Physical Operations team led by DBU Vice President for Administrative Affairs Jonathan Teat.”

“For years, DBU has been honored to be a part of the Baptist World Alliance and we believe in the work that they do to act as a voice for the Baptist family around the world,” said Wright.

“We have known Dr. Elijah Brown for many years and were thrilled to see him named as the new head of this organization. As Dr. Brown seeks to begin this new season of growth and advancement in the history of the BWA, we could not be more pleased than to demonstrate our partnership and support by serving over spring break to help refresh their offices.”

DBU was founded in 1898 as Decatur Baptist College, the first two-year institution of higher education in Texas. It moved to Dallas, US, in 1965, went through a series of developments and growth, and was renamed DBU in 1985.

DBU chancellor and immediate past president, Gary Cook, is a former member of the BWA General Council, chair of the Promotion and Development Committee and a charter member of the General Secretary’s Circle. Other DBU faculty and former students have played important roles in BWA life.

The school hosted past BWA leaders including BWA Presidents Billy Kim, David Coffey, John Upton and Paul Msiza, as well as General Secretaries Denton Lotz and Neville Callam.

Six team members from DBU’s Physical Operations spent one week repainting and replacing carpet.

“It’s been an honor to serve you. We are grateful to God to come and be a small part of what you’re all doing around the world,” said Teat. “As we worked we’ve been praying for the people that would be in this space. Our prayer is that this work is representative of the strong relationship that DBU has with the BWA.”

Brown said, “BWA looks forward to continuing to be a space of welcome for Baptists from around the world. We anticipate hosting an open house once the project has been fully completed.”
THREE REGIONS OF THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE – the All Africa Baptist Fellowship (AABF), the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF) and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) – have plans to establish new offices.

Ground was broken for new permanent headquarters for the AABF on February 2, 2018, in Ibadan, Nigeria. A gift from the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), the ceremony was witnessed by AABF staff and representatives from the NBC.

Participants included Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, a BWA vice president and AABF president; BWA regional secretary for Africa and AABF general secretary, Duro Ayanrinola; NBC President Supo Ayokunle; and AABF Treasurer and NBC Vice President Moses Adebayo.

In September 2017, the EBF opened “Baptist House” in the city of Amsterdam in collaboration with the Union of Baptist Churches in the Netherlands. Located in a renovated and remodeled church building constructed in the 1960s, the building includes offices and facilities for the International Baptist Theological Study Centre as well as the Dutch Baptist Union and its seminary. “The future looks very promising,” said Tony Peck, BWA regional secretary for Europe and EBF general secretary.

The APBF is in the process of relocating its headquarters to Singapore. In the meantime, Vesekhoyi Teteo, elected APBF general secretary in September 2017, will operate from his current base in Okinawa, Japan. “I am finding I will definitely need a staff to help keep the momentum,” Teteo said.

TRANSFORM

BY TONY PECK

SOMETHING NEW HAS BEEN BORN IN EUROPEAN BAPTIST FEDERATION (EBF) life through the Younger Leaders’ Program: TRANSFORM.

Five young women and six young men from all parts of the EBF met twice, in Austria and Armenia, to explore themes of ongoing discipleship, working as a team. The third meeting will be in Beirut, Lebanon, where they will confront opportunities and challenges as leaders, being able to cross borders of culture and religion.

In September 2018, they will gather alongside the EBF Council in Lviv, Ukraine, where the theme will be Conflict Transformation.

The TRANSFORM program is proving to be a worthwhile attempt to “grow” Christian leaders who can operate internationally as well as in their own setting and culture.

Our hope and prayer is to continue beyond the first two-year cycle.

Tony Peck is BWA regional secretary for Europe and general secretary of the European Baptist Federation; excerpted from report to the BWA Executive Committee in March

REEVALUATING MINISTRY IN AFRICA

BY ISAAC DUROSINJESU AYANRINOLA

The theme for the All Africa Baptist Fellowship (AABF) in 2018 is “I Will Build My Church …,” from Mathew 16:18. We are focused on Best Practices for Effective Ministries.

The current situation of many Baptist conventions and unions in Africa is pitiable. This is unconnected to our antecedents. After the Reformation that began in 1517, the church ceased to be one church, one baptism, one Lord. The Reformation affected many things about the church including doctrines, ecclesiology and other practices.

By the time Christianity came to much of Africa, it was denominationally divided. Baptist bodies in Africa came as a result of the missionary efforts of Baptist denominations from Europe and North America.

For many years, these foreign missions taught Africans many things and certain things were not properly handed over. With time, Africans contextualized these teachings and practices or modified them.

Only a few conventions and unions are experiencing real growth and making an impact in their ministries. Others are struggling. It is important to evaluate our approach to ministry and learn best practices from one another that can guarantee success in ministry.

Isaac DurosinJesu Ayanrinola is BWA regional secretary for Africa and general secretary of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship; excerpted from report to the BWA Executive Committee in March
BWA ASSISTS IN RICE DISTRIBUTION IN CAMBODIA

A Baptist World Aid rice distribution project in Cambodia provided assistance to 240 families in Prey Veng and Kompot provinces.

Nhem Nivath, president of the Cambodia Baptist Union (CBU), told the Baptist World Alliance that the months of May to October, when the harvesting season has passed, are difficult for some Cambodians. He said “the CBU has budgeted US$5,000 every year to help starving families.”

Of the 240 families, about 140 were of a non-Christian background. Nivath said Christian response to those in need opens the door to the sharing of the Gospel. It shows that “Christians are caring and loving people.” It demonstrates to Christians the power of compassion in the lives of persons.

PREVENTION IS LIVING

THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE CONTINUES ITS SUPPORT OF A PEACEBUILDING PROGRAM in the New Dawn and Glory neighborhoods in the city of Buenaventura on Colombia’s Pacific Coast, where rival gangs operate and often engage in violent clashes.

The Baptist World Aid funded program is a joint effort between the Baptist University of Cali (BUC) and Alfa and Omega Baptist Church, which had developed a project for youth and children in the neighborhoods.

In 2017, more than 60 young people participated in sessions aimed at preventing and stemming the use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol, cocaine, LSD and cannabis. “The main objective is to prevent and identify situations that favor the initiation of the use and abuse of psychoactive substances in adolescents and young people,” a report from Colombia states.

Through games, dramatic presentations and role playing, “the young people were de-constructing myths about drugs.” They demonstrated situations that lead young people into substance abuse and recounted instances where friends started using drugs.

The BWA previously funded job training in natural resources, including the cultivation of medicinal plants and crops for food in the New Dawn and Glory neighborhoods.

Colombia is one of the most economically unequal countries in the world. Sixty-seven percent of the population lives below the poverty line with 20 million Colombians living on less than US$5 a day.

Bonaventura, which was visited by a BWA delegation in 2013, is the most important port on the Pacific Coast. Seventy five percent of the 1.2 million people living on the Pacific Coast live below the poverty line.

Colombia has the third highest African-descended population in the Americas, after the United States and Brazil. A significant majority of the Colombian-African population is in the Pacific region and is largely poor.

In the nine civil wars between Liberals and Conservatives in the South American country, the poor have been caught in the crossfire.
BAPTIST WORLD AID (BWAID), THE RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT ARM OF THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE, supported the Chiurayi community food security project in Zimbabwe.

The BWAid grant of more than US$11,000 helped cover the cost for constructing a project center, tools and equipment, and medicines and medical supplies.

About 25 persons attended training workshops on farming and post-harvesting techniques and practices.

The training was done “to assist villagers to add value to their produce before taking to the market,” a report from the Southern African country stated. “The group is in the process of registering as a cooperative, and will operate from the project center.”

Additional training is planned during 2018 in apiculture, horticulture, aquaculture and small livestock, such as rabbit rearing. A borehole well and the construction of a reservoir for community water supply and irrigation, food processing facilities and a meeting hall for farmers are also planned for 2018.
THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) BEGAN PREPARATION FOR ITS 11TH ASSEMBLY, SCHEDULED FOR 2021.

David Emmanuel Goatley, executive secretary-treasurer for Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society, in the United States, represents the Baptist World Alliance on the Assembly Planning Committee (APC) that convened at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, from February 1-6.

The 11th Assembly APC consists of members from the WCC Central Committee, representing member churches, regional conferences and global communions of churches, as well as specialized ministries and international ecumenical organizations.

The BWA is one of the global communion of churches included in the planning of the next Assembly.

Goatley joined Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic church leaders from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, North America, South America and Oceania for several days of work to propose a framework for the theme, nature, style and spiritual formation for the Assembly for presentation to the WCC Central Committee in June.


WCC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit observes that Raiser offers “not just an invaluable personal history but also real insight into the ongoing dynamism, transformative challenges and genuine promise of the ecumenical movement in an age of globalization.”

According to Goatley, “The Baptist world family may join the ecumenical family around the world in 2021 where fellowship[s] of churches continue the pilgrimage of walking together to bear witness to our unity in Jesus to the glory of God and for the sake of the world.”

MANGIERI CONFERRED HIGHEST PROFESSIONAL STATUS

CAROLINA CARRO DE MANGIERI, MEETING PLANNING MANAGER FOR THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE, attained Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) status in February this year.

It was conferred by the Events Industry Council, the primary body engaged in advancing the education, certification and professionalism of the meeting planning industry.

“CMP designation represents the best and the brightest throughout the world” and “demonstrates an individual’s comprehensive knowledge of meeting management as well as a commitment to the profession.”

CMPs are considered the leading experts in the global meetings, conventions and exhibitions industry.

Since its inception in 1985, more than 21,000 individuals in 51 countries and territories have earned the CMP designation.

Mangieri is the second BWA staff to attain high professional certification in their respective field in recent years. In 2015, Eron Henry, associate director of Communications for the BWA, received the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR). There are about 5,000 global APRs, regarded as the gold standard among public relations practitioners and professionals.

“CMP designation represents the best and the brightest throughout the world” and “demonstrates an individual’s comprehensive knowledge of meeting management as well as a commitment to the profession.”

The first session was held in 2014. The five-year theme was Faith Working Through Love.

Meetings in England focused on the final dialogue report, which reflects the theology and practices among Baptists and Methodists. It includes a study guide as well as sections on the nature of the church and authority, justification and sanctification, baptism and Christian initiation, worship and mission.

Presentation of the report will be made in July to both the BWA Executive Committee, which meets in Zurich, Switzerland; and WMC meetings in Seoul, South Korea.

Participants worshipped together each day, drawing on Baptist and Methodist traditions. They attended an ecumenical reception, a Sunday worship service at Salisbury Methodist Church and toured places of interest to religious and Methodist life.

The Baptist team included co-chair, Curtis Freeman, research professor and director of the Baptist House of Studies, Duke University Divinity School, United States; Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, professor of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria; Valérie Duval-Poujol, lecturer of Biblical Exegesis, Catholic Institute, France; Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, US; Stephen Holmes, head of School of Divinity, University of St. Andrews, Scotland; and R. L. Hnuni, principal, Greenhill Public School, Mizoram, India.

The Methodist delegation was led by co-chair, Tim Macquiban, director, Methodist Ecumenical Office, Italy; Paul Chilcote, professor, Asbury Theological Seminary, US; Ulrike Schuler, professor, Reutlingen School of Theology, Germany; Christine Gooden-Benguche, secretary, Jamaica District Conference, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas; and Robert Gribben, professor emeritus, Uniting Church Faculty of Theology, Australia.

THE POWER OF ONE

BY MOREEN SHARP

THIRTEEN WOMEN AND TWO MEN FROM FIVE COUNTRIES JOINED A BAPTIST CONTINGENT to attend the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations (UN) in New York, United States, from March 12-17. They were among 9,000 from around the globe to learn about and hear solutions to issues women face.

We heard story after story of women who saw a need, stepped out and did something about it.

Pamela from Brazil, a victim of domestic violence, promotes awareness through graffiti art; teaches graffiti art on the theme, “Power of One”; and instructs her students (mostly young men) about domestic violence.

Victoria from Taiwan was raped at 10 and again at 15 years of age. Her trauma almost ended in suicide. She realized that if she did kill herself she would not have a voice to stop violence. As a high school student she formed Read Your Pain, which has given women healing through art and telling their stories.

Shahini of India saw the trauma that child survivors of human trafficking were going through and started dance therapy classes with them. Mely of the Philippines is a survivor of human trafficking. After her rescue and a process of recovery, she now works to help other women who are being trafficked.

Sister Fa of Senegal travels to unsafe situations to teach against female genital mutilation in her country. She uses music and rap to teach. Eve of Kenya saw the need for young women to be educated and mentored in her area of the country. She brought together 10 women, professional leaders, to start HerStory.

One person, seeing the need, stepped out to do something, making a difference in lives.

At the UN, we had an opportunity to learn, grow and apply what we are learning with God’s love, sharing God’s healing along with the physical and emotional help we are giving.

There are many with similar stories. Faithful Baptist women around the world see a need and step out to let God work through them to minister to those needs with God’s love. The power of one plus God!

As we each let God work through us in our context, God’s light is shining bright all over the globe!

Moreen Sharp is president of the North American Baptist Women’s Union, a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department (BWAWD) and interim executive director of the BWAWD.
BWA UN REP TO RECEIVE HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

CHRISTER DAELANDER, A BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE REPRESENTATIVE to the United Nations (UN) and religious freedom representative of the European Baptist Federation (EBF), is the nominee for the 2018 Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award.

The nomination was announced to the Executive Committee of the BWA on March 6 at its meeting in Falls Church, Virginia, in the United States. The award is to be presented during the General Council meeting in Zurich, Switzerland, in July.

Established in 2006, the Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award is given by the BWA for significant and effective activities to secure, protect, restore or preserve human rights.

It includes all rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other declared rights by UN bodies such as the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council and the International Court of Justice.

Daelander, of Sweden, is an official BWA representative to the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva, Switzerland, working closely with representatives from the Vatican and other Christian traditions. He has engaged religious freedom issues in Europe, the Middle East and, especially, Central Asia.

Daelander provided firsthand accounts of religious freedom violations in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan to UN Periodic Reviews. He visited Central Asia making contacts with representatives of governments, embassies and organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

In November 2017, Daelander brought together key people from Christian minority communities in Central Asia, offering training and practical tools to defend religious freedom in their own context.

“Christer is a primary example of Baptist commitment to human rights and freedom,” declared BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown. “His deep faith in God and his commitment to the church exemplify the liberating power we have in Christ Jesus. We commend him for his loyalty, faith and service.”

The EBF said Daelander’s selflessness and faithfulness have “led to renewed action on behalf of human rights and religious liberty within our community.” He is Christ-like “in dealing with all” and is “a faithful advocate for authentic Baptist witness.”

Karin Wiborn, general secretary of the Swedish Christian Council, said, “Christer is doing outstanding advocacy work for human rights in the Uniting Church in Sweden, in the EBF and on the behalf of the BWA.”


“Christer is a primary example of Baptist commitment to human rights and freedom. His deep faith in God and his commitment to the church exemplify the liberating power we have in Christ Jesus. We commend him for his loyalty, faith and service.”

–Elijah Brown. “

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Karen Kirlew was installed as the first woman president of the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU) on February 25. Thousands of Jamaican Baptists attended the worship service at the National Arena in Kingston, the island’s capital.

Her installation comes after 235 years of Baptist witness on the Caribbean island and 169 years since the formation of the JBU in 1849.

Kirlew is a protégé of Neville Callam, immediate past general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, who baptized her and mentored her for ministry.

She joins a cohort of church women who have taken leadership of Christian organizations on the island in recent times, including the Moravians and the Methodists. In October last year, her Baptist colleague, Merlyn Hyde-Riley, was elected the first female president of the Jamaica Council of Churches.

Her election as Baptist leader resulted from the “calling of God.” It had nothing to do with her but came from “not being able to resist the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

Kirlew understands the unique role her presidency can play in the lives of women. “I perceive that as the first woman president there are certain expectations. I will endeavor to express the purpose for which I was designed, which is to reflect God’s image as a wife, mother, daughter and theologian.”

Kirlew hopes “to encourage women to fulfill God’s original plan for them while being who they are.” It is not about superiority or inferiority. “This will not be about trying to prove that women are better or stronger but about gaining a deeper appreciation for women, an appreciation for who they are.” She hopes her time in office will “assist with confidence building, especially those women and girls who are abused, displaced and/or rejected.”

She expects to enter into conversations “on the issues affecting women and children. This cannot be accomplished without hearing from them and without having conversations with men.”

The new JBU leader has broader concerns. “The primary mission is about the church in Jamaica exercising its role to build the foundations of community. Rebuilding community must include a heightened focus on the core values of community and family. Fundamental to all this is how we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Through the JBU, she will explore “opportunities to demonstrate who we ought to be as God’s stewards and servants.” She would want the JBU to make “available the resources we have for the sake of enriching others and improving the conditions of people’s lives. In the process the JBU’s life will also be improved and enriched.”

The JBU has very clear mandates. She pointed to the theme during her two-year presidency, which runs until 2020, “Being God’s People in God’s World-Living in Partnership.”

As one of the leading church bodies on the island, the JBU cannot ignore its context, one defined by political, social and environmental concerns. “The JBU must be in conversation with political and civic leaders. Global warming is a worldwide problem. Small island nations like ours must be concerned about climate change. Conversations with legislators and environmentalists are welcome.”

She hints at some issues in Jamaican society, declaring that “the church can lead in facilitating new expressions of dignity in social interactions and in all other aspects of life.” The church must respond to “people who are hurting.” It should address “the issues facing women in abuse and equity, the problem of crime and violence, peace building and managing and resolving disputes, education and training, poverty and natural disasters.”

Eron Henry, associate director of Communications of the Baptist World Alliance, endorsed the election and installation of Kirlew to the JBU presidency. “God has brought a new day, a new time, a new hour,” he said at the worship service of roughly 10,000 worshippers on February 25.

He told Kirlew she was specially chosen and gifted for this hour. “God placed God’s hand on you” and “God issued God’s call to you.” She should have confidence in her calling because “no one can take that from you.”

“This will not be about trying to prove that women are better or stronger but about gaining a deeper appreciation for women, an appreciation for who they are.”

—Karen Kirlew
BAPTIST WOMAN TAKES HELM OF JAMAICA’S CHURCH GROUP

Merlyn Hyde-Riley, Associate General Secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU), was elected the first woman president of the Jamaica Council of Churches (JCC) in October 2017. The JCC, formed in 1941, is the oldest Christian ecumenical organization in the Caribbean island.

She was one of 35 members of the Baptist World Alliance Emerging Leaders Network from 2005-2010 and is currently a member of the BWA Commission on Doctrine and Christian Unity.

Unity, prophetic engagement and reestablishment of trust are issues of concern to Hyde-Riley.

As a committed Christian ecumenist, Hyde-Riley hopes for “new relationships with one another, greater convergence on the theological issues that divide us and a deeper expression of common witness and service.”

She reminds of Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21, “that all may be one … so that the world may believe that you have sent me,” as well as the Nicene Creed where, “as Christians we confess the church as ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic.’”

She recognizes that unity in action and purpose is a challenge for churches. “Priority is often to our own communion,” she said. “Ecumenical projects are not given priority.” This is exacerbated by difficulties in “funding projects due to a challenging economic climate.”

Hyde-Riley will try to “break down barriers that allow us to speak together on issues but [prevent us from sharing] in the sacrament of communion. The plan is to renew these conversations on church unity that have been absent for some time.”

Jamaican society needs the church to be authentic in its prophetic witness. She hopes for “consistent prophetic engagement in speaking truth to power.” The church needs “to play a greater role in halting and even reversing the decay in our country through more deliberate engagement in/with our society.” She highlights the need for greater emphasis “on human dignity and life, neighborliness and community, respect for the other, greater attention to moral and ethical considerations.”

JCC is strategically placed as a voice of the Christian community in Jamaica. “Not only do churches look to us for leadership but even persons outside of the church.” The JCC can help churches work toward creating a society reflective of “a community of justice, peace, equity, liberation and hope. We hope to continue to influence decision making and laws consistent with our understanding of the gospel.”

Trust in the church has eroded. “The days of implicit trust and respect for the church are gone. There is greater disconnect.” Actions and misdeeds have created challenges. “This is a difficult period for the church in Jamaica. The church has come under greater scrutiny in recent times and does not enjoy the kind of respect once taken for granted.”

Secularization has taken its toll. “This is an increasingly secular society yet the church must remain committed to its missional mandate.” A secularist lifestyle is especially prevalent among young people who “have little or no regard for the church.”

JCC can move the country in the right direction by providing “consistent and clear leadership to the nation as it struggles with issues that stem from a deterioration in values and attitudes.” If the JCC does not fill this leadership void, it may be “filled in ways that do not help in the communication of messages that are helpful in creating a better society.”

As a woman in positions of leadership historically occupied by men, Hyde-Riley is aware of the contribution she can make. “I intend to use my position and influence to mentor a few women, ensure gender mainstreaming in what we do as a Council and continue to support the existing practice of striving for gender equity in all that we do.”

She is grateful to those who led the way, including Rubye Gayle, a Baptist and former general secretary of the JCC. “There have been women before me serving in significant roles in the JCC as vice presidents and general secretaries. Increasingly women have been on the Executive as they become presidents, moderators and general secretaries of their

“I intend to use my position and influence to mentor a few women, ensure gender mainstreaming in what we do as a Council and continue to support the existing practice of striving for gender equity in all that we do.”

—MERLYN HYDE-RILEY

Marilyn Hyde-Riley
BAPTIST WOMAN TAKES HELM IN JAMAICA CONTINUED

respective organizations. It was, therefore, only a matter of time before a woman would become president.”

She expects that her presidency will set a new normal. “Yes, it was long in coming. It took 76 years but I hope I will be just one of many other women who will be elected to this position. It is my hope also that women can bring their own unique perspectives that will impact the Council positively.”

“As a fellow member of the BWA Emerging Leaders Network for five years, I am delighted that one of our other members has been elected to a position of significant leadership,” said BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown who, like Hyde-Riley, was a member of the BWA Emerging Leaders Network. “Merlyn was a valued member of that team of 35 young Christian leaders from around the world. I wish her all the best in her tenure as a leader in Jamaica’s Christian community.”

THE BAPTIST KING

A BAPTIST YOUTH LEADER AND ENTREPRENEUR, he did a postgraduate master's degree in Humanitarian and Refugee Studies.

He’s also a king.

His Royal Highness Oyinlola II rules 40 villages and farm settlements in Oyo State in Nigeria. He is one of several obas, local or traditional kings in Yorubaland, a region in modern Benin, Nigeria and Togo in West Africa.

Installed on January 12, 2018, his royal appointment was unexpected in September 2017 when he was elected president of the All Africa Baptist Youth Fellowship (AABYF). He was on official church business in Sierra Leone several weeks later when he received news of the passing of his uncle, the incumbent king. The kingmakers informed Oyinlola he was one of three candidates, two Baptist Christians and one Muslim, to succeed the late king.

The blur of activities following the announcement included the return to his hometown from the city of Ibadan, Nigeria, where he lived; extended times of mourning; the selection process; and royal preparations for his installation as king. The coronation, which will include attendance by leaders of Oyo State, follows at a future date.

“I'm not the first king who is Baptist,” Oyinlola explained. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria, “I'm the sixth or seventh Baptist to become king.” There was a time when Christians shunned becoming king because of concerns with aspects of the installation and coronation ceremonies. Oyinlola’s own father, a prince and longtime Baptist, turned down his election to be installed as the local king and the crown went to his brother (Oyinlola’s uncle) instead.

In more recent times, the ceremonies have undergone changes and more Christians are accepting coronation. In Oyinlola’s case, Christian meetings, prayer gatherings and worship services formed part of the installation exercises.

Oyinlola balances life as a royal and Christian leader. Justice and peace are at the core of his concerns. Protection from local threats, especially those posed by Fulani militants, is paramount. Providing for the basic needs of his people is a need. Negotiating an equitable deal stemming from recent discoveries of rich mineral deposits in his dominion is another. He wants to ensure benefits accrue to his people rather than to large external mining companies and local looters and plunderers.

Five high chiefs report directly to him along with eight other chiefs. These chiefs have direct responsibility for the 40 villages and farm settlements under Oyinlola’s rule. He recalled the awkwardness he felt when his own father and other men of his father's age bowed and prostrated themselves before him, paying him homage.

He sees his kingly role as a call to duty. “It is an opportunity to be a model for the people. In the community we have traditional worshippers, Christians, Muslims and those who have no religious beliefs. I'm king for all of them.”

He leans heavily on his faith, giving primacy to God. “God is King of kings and Lord of lords. You are expected to be humble before him. My responsibility is God first, in everything. God has helped me through training and prayers. The Holy Spirit has been guiding me.”
Being king and financially independent make things easier. As king, Oyinlola has greater freedom of movement. As an entrepreneur, he has the means to travel. The family operates several cooking gas refilling and petrol service stations and he has his own. These enable him to fulfill both roles as kingly ruler and Baptist youth leader for Africa without personal concern for resources.

Oyinlola has four priorities as AABYF president: evangelism, peace initiatives, youth empowerment and youth mobilization. Youth empowerment includes the establishment of skills and vocational training centers to encourage entrepreneurship, aimed primarily at young women. Pilot projects are to be established in South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria and Kenya. If successful, the program will be rolled out in other countries.

“The aim is to establish self-sustaining economic projects,” Oyinlola explained. Currently at the proposal stage, there are plans to seek grant funding. “If this is done, in the next 10 to 15 years BWA will be proud of Africa. I see a very bright future.”

Oyinlola II and queen in one of several activities during his installation as king

**A GLOBAL ADVOCATE**

FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, SALAI BAWI LIAN MANG HAS BEEN ON A GLOBAL QUEST to bring attention to the plight of the Chin people in Myanmar (Burma). The main group in Chin State (called Chinland by the Chin), in the Southeast Asian country, the Chin are predominantly Christian in a country where most citizens are Buddhist. Most Chin are Baptists.

The Chin, along with other minority groups such as the Karen and Kachin, have experienced much persecution over the past 60 years. Tens of thousands are exiled in India, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, the United States, Canada and elsewhere, while many more are displaced inside Myanmar.

Abuses committed against the Chin are numerous: a lack of education provided by the state and the closure of privately-run Chin schools, forcing Chin children into Burmese schools and into becoming Buddhist monks and nuns, the banning of political parties and the jailing of political representatives and activists, the invasion of lands and the destruction of agricultural crops and produce, the burning of villages and the displacement of tens of thousands and the enslavement of entire groups and the rape of women.

Churches and Christians have been targeted. “The Christian religion has deep roots in the Chin society,” Mang explained. “More than 90 percent of Chins are Christians. Christianity now is a second culture for many Chin people.” Numerous Christians have been killed or arrested and imprisoned. Church buildings have been destroyed and crosses burned, often replaced by Buddhist pagodas.

Mang led the formation of the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) in 1995 and has been sharing the story of the Chin people with foreign governments and global organizations. Mang and other CHRO leaders have testified before governments, multilateral groups and nongovernmental organizations.
A GLOBAL ADVOCATE
CONTINUED


Evidence provided by CHRO has been cited by the United Nations and the United States Department of State in their reports on human rights and religious freedom on Myanmar. In expelling Myanmar as a member, the International Labor Organization cited evidence provided by CHRO. Other institutions and organizations, including Amnesty International, Refugees International, Human Rights Watch and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, have used CHRO reports to take actions, make decisions or do representations.

The Baptist World Alliance sent several delegations to refugee camps in Thailand and made representations on behalf of the Chin and other marginalized groups at the UN, the US Department of State and in other forums. In 2006 and 2014, the BWA passed resolutions on human rights abuses, violent repression and religious liberty restrictions in Myanmar.

Other Baptists have provided support to CHRO and to the Chin cause, including Chin Baptist churches and groups in Washington, DC, Maryland, Illinois, Texas and elsewhere in the US; Ottawa and Vancouver in Canada; and in Australia and New Zealand.

Led by Mang, CHRO continues to provide human rights documentation on violations in Chinland and western Myanmar, engage in international campaign and advocacy, plan capacity building programs, especially in civil and political rights and women empowerment, offer humanitarian assistance and attend to refugee issues.

“Activist dreamer”

Juliet Kilpin, a Baptist pastor in the United Kingdom, has been an urban mission advocate and activist for nearly 30 years.

She works primarily through organizations and groups she cofounded. Urban Expression is a mission outreach agency to under-churched urban neighborhoods. Peaceful Borders is a collaboration of peacemakers.

Through Urban Expression she, along with her husband, Jim, planted a church in Tower Hamlets, East London, in 1997. She co-runs the Crucible Course, which equips people on the margins to follow Jesus, and oversaw the launch of The Fishermen’s Chapel.

“I am an activist dreamer who believes the world can be a better place,” she said. “Pioneer, initiator, reflector, facilitator, trainer, consultant, writer, activist, speaker, networker … [I] always feel there’s more to be done.”

In recent years, Kilpin has spent time addressing the refugee crisis affecting parts of Europe, focusing on Calais in northern France, a principal ferry crossing point between that country and England. The refugee camp in Calais housed about 7,000 persons.

She has been to other places where people live on the margins – Kampala in Zambia, Phnom Penh in Cambodia, Lima in Peru, Sao Paulo in Brazil and Tijuana in Mexico. But the situation in Calais is especially dismal. “We are witnessing a paradigm shift and entering a new normal.”

She is staggered by the scale of the refugee crisis and the lack of response. “The European refugee crisis has been called the largest movement of people across Europe since World War Two. … It is stretching our existing political, border, charitable and humanitarian aid policies to the max.”

She befriended refugees in Calais, listens to their stories and shares their experiences with others. “Every visit to Calais is an intense and privileged learning opportunity. I hope that together the peacemakers there can help to birth a peaceful city.”

Despite the dismal scenes in Calais, she believes “God is already there,” and that “God’s mission is not restricted by borders.”

“I am an activist dreamer who believes the world can be a better place.”

Juliet Kilpin

“The Christian religion has deep roots in the Chin society. More than 90 percent of Chins are Christians.”

– Salai Bawi Lian Mang
CROATIAN BAPTISTS ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES IN PARTS OF EUROPE. Helping to lead the charge is Elvis Džafić, coordinator of volunteers for Croatian Baptist Aid. He heads a team of more than 10 volunteers who meet the needs of displaced persons inside Croatia and Greece.

Džafić, from Sarajevo in Bosnia but who adopted Croatia as home, said almost everywhere he went, Muslim refugees marveled at the generosity of Christians. “From the Middle East to Berlin in Germany, refugees say, ‘wherever we go, there’s always a church that helps us.” He recounted their astonishment. “We are amazed. We are Muslims and you are Christians and you help us.”

Džafić was himself moved by Christian compassion back in the 1990s when he was young. He recalled how impressed he was to find Christians from other countries coming into war-torn Bosnia to provide humanitarian aid and relief. “I found it powerful that people left home and country to share the Gospel and to help others.”

Some of these Christians were Baptists from the United States. Their acts of love and compassion led him to faith in Jesus Christ as a 10-year-old.

At the time, beginning in 1992, Bosnia went through almost four years of civil war. The conflict left more than 100,000 dead and was the first instance of genocide in Europe since World War II.

Džafić believes Christian compassion provides powerful witness. “Compassion speaks for itself,” he told the Baptist World Alliance. This is why he committed to help those who are displaced by war and conflict.

About 400,000 refugees have passed through Croatia in the past few years, mainly from the Middle Eastern countries of Syria, Iraq, Iran and parts of Africa, as well as Ukraine and Moldova in Europe.

Džafić said that, in 2015, more than 280 volunteers from 73 countries traveled to Croatia to work in refugee relief. Baptists in the country are engaging with other groups to assist refugees in integrating by providing education, training and employment, healthcare, housing and shelter. They do family reunification and offer peace and reconciliation training.

Refugees are encouraged to share their culture. Several displaced persons formed a nongovernmental organization that prepares meals from their African culture to share with local Croats.

Croatian Baptists turned their attention to Greece where there were about 50,000 refugees. Džafić said the name “Baptist” resonates with the Greeks. As Orthodox Christians, “Baptist” is associated with a theological term they are familiar with. This gives them an entrée into the country where those in charge, including military generals, allow them to operate.

In addition to food, nutritional supplies and other necessities, the Baptists from Croatia offer a mobile laundry service to refugees in Greece.

“The crisis can help the Christian community in other profound ways. “This is a perfect time for organizations and churches to reflect on their own structure and to cooperate, joining together to meet and coordinate needs on a global scale.”

–ELVIS DŽAFIC

Džafić, who graduated from the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia, in 2015, bemoaned the lack of compassionate response by some European countries. “Some countries stopped taking refugees,” he observed. “The world is not prioritizing the refugee crisis” because it is “seen through the lens of fear.”

He contends that the refugee crisis can become a blessing. “Refugees can help their host countries to improve,” he declared. “They can help the churches as well, not just in numerical growth, but in their witness through deeds and values.”

The crisis can help the Christian community in other profound ways. “This is a perfect time for organizations and churches to reflect on their own structure and to cooperate, joining together to meet and coordinate needs on a global scale.”

The Christian response is no less than fulfilling the mandate of Jesus. “It’s all about Jesus,” declared Džafić. “He sets the example and said what we should do.”
WE THANK YOU FOR THE HELP YOU HAVE SHOWN, through prayer and project funding, since the crisis began in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2012.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the conflicts have led to an increase in humanitarian needs on an unprecedented scale since 2014.

By end of 2017, heavy fighting between armed groups around the town of Paoua in the north resulted in the displacement of more than 25,000. Internally Displaced People (IDPs) continue to flock to Paoua.

Clashes between armed groups caused displacement of 73,000 from the city of Bria. The city of Bambari welcomed more than 17,800 displaced persons following security incidents in surrounding cities, including Ilipa, Ndassima and Djoubissi. There is an increase in robberies, burglaries and other crimes in the region of Kaga-Bandoro.

Displacement grew from 402,240 in January 2017 to approximately 600,000 by end of July, reaching previous levels recorded in August 2014. This trend was maintained and reached 688,700 at the end of December 2017.

This rise was the result of the resurgence of violence and the multiplication of hotbeds across the country. Some areas known for relative stability experience violence. Others that had returned to calm have fallen back into instability.

About 2.4 million are in need of humanitarian aid. Two million are food insecure.

Faced with this perpetual instability, we invite the Baptist family to help the Central African Republic through prayer, mobilization of funds for urgent relief and resources for trauma healing.

We appeal to you to urge the United Nations to intervene to bring peace to the country.

Nicolas Aimé Simplice Singa-Gbazia is president of the Association of Baptist Churches of Central African Republic and a member of the BWA General Council.

The convention engages in mission outreach and provides food to refugees and displaced persons inside South Sudan.

"Please continue to pray for us as we minister through giving physical and spiritual food for both the refugees and displaced persons in South Sudan," Dima pleads.

South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, making it the newest country in the world. It has been experiencing civil war since 2013.

About two million people are internally displaced. Another one million fled to neighboring countries, especially Kenya, Sudan and Uganda.

"Please continue to pray for us as we minister through giving physical and spiritual food for both the refugees and displaced persons in South Sudan."

—EDWARD DIMA

Edward Dima, president, Baptist Convention of South Sudan, visiting South Sudanese refugees in Uganda
EUROPEAN BAPTIST FEDERATION PRESIDENT JENNI ENTRICAN AND I VISITED BAPTIST CHURCHES in some of the poorest communities around Cairo, Egypt.

One of these is a “garbage town,” not on any map and with no electricity or official connection to a water supply. The people there go in to Cairo to collect garbage and bring it back to sort and recycle.

Some years ago a group of Christians met there to pray about starting a church. They were inspired by the story of Jesus multiplying the loaves and the fishes. From that small beginning and over several years, they have seen their witness multiply.

I was astonished to see a five-floor church building taking shape, mostly financed by a church in Korea that heard about these Christians who spend their days sorting garbage from Cairo. This building will be a church, a kindergarten, a medical center and a place where people learn to read and write.

It is not surprising that pride of place in one of the rooms in the church is a large picture of five very Middle East-looking loaves of bread and two fish, the story of the miracle of Jesus that continues to inspire them. This is truly mission “in the way of Jesus,” who takes our slender resources of people, time and finances and multiplies them so that many more are fed – literally – with the living Bread of Life.
VALUES AND THE MORAL DECISIONS YOUNG PEOPLE FACE are just as important as academics at Beirut Baptist School (BBS).

Grade 10-12 students are learning about the dangers of drug addiction thanks to a partnership between the school and Cedar Rehab, a drug rehabilitation charity. The founder of Cedar Rehab, Ahmad Khattab, shared at an awareness session at BBS in December his experience as a former drug addict.

At 15 years old, Ahmad started smoking hashish and ended up taking heroin, his life quickly spiraling out of control. “In one year, I was willing to sacrifice all my values,” he told the students.

Ahmad delved deep into the underlying causes of drug addiction in Lebanon and shared the impact that addiction has as addicts surrender to their desires. “Drugs destroy real friendships and replace them with fake relations based on exploitation,” he said.

BBS students are not just hearing about addiction through awareness sessions. They are taking action. In April [2018], they are raising money to support one young addict get over the addiction that threatens to destroy their life. “Some students have seen the damaging effects of addiction on people they know,” said Celia Khater, head of BBS’s Counseling and Career Guidance Department. “They are keen to help young addicts to overcome a problem that threatens to destroy their future and cut their lives short.”

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“Drugs destroy real friendships and replace them with fake relations based on exploitation.” –AHMAD KHATTAB

ON THE GROUND IN IRAQ

ASHAR WARDA, A CHALDEAN CATHOLIC CLERIC AND ARCHBISHOP of Erbil, Iraq, said conditions in the country remain dire even though they do not make news headlines.

He was speaking during a roundtable discussion at the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom in Washington, DC, in the United States, on February 15.

Warda said fewer than 200,000 Christians remain in the Middle Eastern country and accuses the Iraqi government of ignoring the kidnapping and killing of Christians. Christians are being burned out, are forced from their homes and are unable to earn a living. The Nineveh Reconstruction Committee estimates 14,000 houses were burned or otherwise destroyed and 20,000 properties were stolen from Christians. Though 5,000 families returned to liberated villages, 6,000 families are waiting to return home.

Though the plight of Iraqi Christians has long been on the United Nations (UN) radar, the UN has not sent aid because those who are displaced are living in churches instead of internally displaced persons camps. Churches, particularly those in Kurdistan, are the only group providing aid. Airports have been closed, restricting reconstruction and the provision of aid.
Graham, a global figure who traveled to and preached in dozens of countries, had deep Baptist roots.

Born on a farm near Charlotte, North Carolina, he was ordained at the Peniel Baptist Church in Palatka, Florida, in the US, and served as pastor of the Village Church of Western Springs (now Western Springs Baptist Church) in Illinois, US, from 1943-1945.

Graham became a full-time evangelist for American Youth for Christ in 1944 and was charter vice president for Youth for Christ International from 1945-1950.

He founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the US, in 1950 while serving as president of Northwestern Schools, which he led from 1947-1952. Northwestern Schools comprised a liberal arts college, a Bible school and a theological seminary.

In addition to planning evangelistic crusades, ministries of BGEA, which relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina, in 2003, included the weekly “Hour of Decision” radio program; a syndicated newspaper column, “My Answer,” carried by newspapers both nationally and internationally; and Decision magazine, the official publication of the association that has a circulation of more than 425,000.

Graham participated in and was keynote speaker at every Baptist World Congress planned by the Baptist World Alliance between 1950 and 1990, including in 1960 where he preached to a packed Maracanã soccer stadium at the closing service in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At that time, the stadium had a capacity of nearly 200,000. He also addressed the final session of the BWA’s Baptist Youth World Conference in 1968 in Berne, Switzerland.

Graham and civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., collaborated. Both Graham and King traveled together to the 1960 Baptist World Congress in Brazil where Graham planned a dinner in honor of King. In his autobiography, Just As I Am, Graham recounted their time in Rio de Janeiro:

I had known Martin Luther King, Jr., for several years. His father, who was called Big Mike, called him Little Mike. He asked me to call him just plain Mike. … While in Rio [for the Baptist World Alliance], I gave a dinner … in honor of Mike, and I invited Southern Baptist leaders from the United States to come. I wanted to build a bridge between blacks and whites in our own South, and this seemed like a good opportunity to move toward that goal.

Graham defied American state and local authorities in disobeying segregation laws. In 1963 he posted bail for King to be released from jail during the Birmingham campaign. He held integrated evangelistic crusades in Birmingham, Alabama, US, on Easter 1964 in the aftermath of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and toured Alabama again in the wake of the violence that accompanied the first Selma to Montgomery march in 1965.

Along with Coretta Scott King, Kings’ widow, Graham was honorary co-chair of the BWA-sponsored International Summit of Baptists Against Racism and Ethnic Conflict at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, US, in January 1999.

His more than 30 books included bestselling and award winning works such as Facing Death and the Life After; Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse; Angels: God’s Secret Agents; World Aflame; and Peace With God.

In addition to numerous honorary doctoral degrees, Graham earned degrees and diplomas from the Florida Bible Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida, and Wheaton College in Illinois, both in the US.

Funeral services were held at the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte on March 2.

Predeceased by wife, Ruth, in 2007, he is survived by sons, William III (Franklin) and Nelson; and daughters, Virginia, Anne and Ruth.
ON THE NIGHT BEFORE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WAS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED, he led his disciples to a garden outside the city at the foot of Mount Olive in the Kidron Valley to spend the night in prayer.

The gospels do not state the length of time the Lord Jesus spent in prayer in the garden. However, one may conclude that the prayer went until midnight or early morning. In the language of today, the Lord had an all-night prayer vigil.

They were in an open field at night. Just for prayer. According to the gospels, the Lord used to go alone to pray. This time, he had the disciples with him. The Lord Jesus kept pushing his disciples to pray but they did not rise to the occasion. It was after he ascended into Heaven that they caught the spirit of prayer.

The commitment to prayer became a lifestyle of the early church. The same spirit was carried forward by early Christian hermits like Antony of Egypt; men and women who deserted city life and committed to spend their life praying in the wilderness.

In the 1960s in South Africa William Duma, a Baptist pastor, became known for a strong consistent prayer life. The late Rev. Duma spent at least 15 days at the beginning of every year on a mountain for prayer and fasting. This became the hallmark of Pastor Duma’s ministry whose prayer life influenced many Christians in South Africa. It became common among Christians to set aside time to go to a mountain or open field for prayer and fasting.

In the early days of my ministry my wife joined The Women of the Mountain, a prayer group of women. They met once a month for fasting and prayer. These women understood that God called them to stand in the gap to intercede for the nation. For an entire weekend each month, they went to a solitary place to pray. The weekend began with fasting from Friday morning. In the evening they congregated after they spent the whole weekend praying. They camped out in the open, on the hill or in the bush. They began Friday evening, the whole day Saturday, until Sunday morning, spending the entire time in praying. There were great testimonies about the movement of the Spirit of the Lord. People were getting converted to Christ, including husbands and children of some of those ladies.

When South Africa was governed through a state of emergency, the soldiers and the police suppressed the people. The church in South Africa rose up and stood in the gap with prayer. An interdenominational Women’s Movement known as Umnyano (a Xhosa word for unity) organized women for prayer. These Christians stood in the gap and interceded for the country.

I believe prayer played a major role in the liberation of South Africa. The church stood in the gap and prayed that our incarcerated leaders would not die in prison. The church invoked the name of God to bring down the apartheid government.

When the Institute for Contextual Theology through the South African Council of Churches published the Kairos Document, it opened the floodgates of prayers for the evil government to fall. Before the Kairos Document was published, Christians doubted whether it was right to pray for the downfall of a government because the Bible in Romans 13:1 says, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

The Kairos Document shed light into the interpretation of that text. Christians understood that illegitimate governments like the apartheid regime were not established by the will of God. Therefore, it had to be prayed down to fall. The church stood in the gap to pray against the shedding of blood in my country.

God is calling Christians all over the world to take up our positions and stand in the gap with fervent prayers. “And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense” (Rev 5:8). The golden bowls symbolized the prayer of God’s people.

In the Garden of Gethsemane the Lord Jesus divided his disciples into two groups. He informed the first group of nine disciples that he was going a little farther to pray. When reflecting on the agony we face every day, we cannot afford to faint. We have to rise and take our position in the gap and pray. When our communities face attacks from gun wielding men and women, when dictators do not give up power, when fools rise to power, when corruption become the culture of the day, we have to stand in the gap and pray.”

–PAUL MSIZA

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PAUL MSIZA, PRESIDENT
We live in a time when the world is in great agony. As we entered Lent when the Lord Jesus faced the pain of the cross, we heard words of the Lord Jesus afresh in our spirit. “Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Could you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak’” (Mar 14:37).

We know from the text (Matthew 26:36-46) that three could not stand in the gap in prayer. Matthew says their eyes were heavy. I am familiar with that heaviness. On many occasions I set an alarm clock to awake at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. for early morning prayer and I struggled with heavy eyes. At times, I have the same struggle to focus during all-night prayer while my eyes need some sleep. However, the deep conviction from within propels us to pray.

When reflecting on the agony we face every day, we cannot afford to faint. We have to rise and take our position in the gap and pray. When our communities face attacks from gun wielding men and women, when dictators do not give up power, when fools rise to power, when corruption become the culture of the day, we have to stand in the gap and pray.

When parts of the world suffer because of drought and when there are no revivals in our churches, we cannot afford to sleep but go on our knees and seek the face of God and pray.

We should continue with protest marches and proclaim justice and freedom for all. We should continue to declare the Good News of salvation. But we know that our power comes from the garden of wailing where we travai and invoke the name of our God until heaven opens and evil powers begin to fall.

When we stand in the gap and pray, God will hear from Heaven and heal our land. Jesus Christ is the door that leads our prayer to the throne of God our Father.

“...and freedom for all. We should continue to declare the Good News of salvation. But we know that our power comes from the garden of wailing where we travail and invoke the name of our God until heaven opens and evil powers begin to fall.”

—PAUL MSIZA

Books


A narrative history that explores the work of Baptists in the United States during the Second World War.

Michael Friday, And Lead Us Not Into Dysfunction: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of Church Organizations and Their Leaders, Wipf and Stock, 2017

Examines the causes, level and state of dysfunction that affect Christian congregations and institutions and lessons that can be learned.
How to Give

PRAY DAILY
bwanet.org/resources/baptists-in-prayer

STAY CONNECTED
BWA newsletters, mobile app,
@TheBWA, the_BWA (Instagram)
@TheBWA (Twitter)
Groups/bwanet (Facebook)

GIVE IMMEDIATELY
by check, money order, wire transfer, credit card,
online or through Twitter (@TinyGive)

GIVE TALENTS,
services, or tangible gifts (gifts in kind)

GIVE PASSIVELY
(smile. Amazon.com and www.goodsearch.com
Choose Baptist World Alliance)

PLAN
a later gift of money or property from your estate

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